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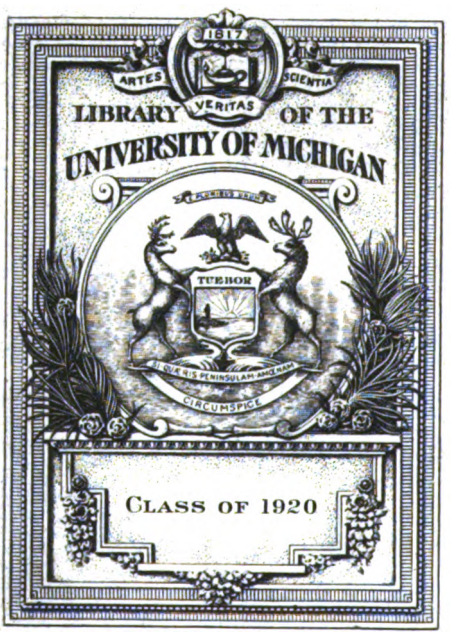

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FIGHTING TANKS

An account of The Royal Tank Corps in action 1916-1919.

Written, or from material supplied, by Major-General Sir Hugh Elles, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.; Major-General Sir John Ponsonby, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.; Colonel J. C. F. Fuller, C.B.E. D.S.O.; Colonel J. Uzielli, D.S.O., M.C.; Colonel Le Q. Martel, C.M.G., D.S.O.; Commander Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O.; Lieutenant-Colonel E. Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C.; Captain Thomas Reginald Price, D.S.O., M.C.; Captain J. L. Cottle, M.C.; Sergeant E. Hearn, M.M.; and other Officers and N.C.O.'s. Edited by G. Murray Wilson, late Senior Chaplain to The Royal Tank Corps.

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INTRODUCTION

IN collating the material for *Fighting Tanks* the editor is most grateful for the help of Brigadier K. M. Laird, C.M.G., D.S.O., Commandant of the Royal Tank Corps Training Centre at Wool and Major-General Sir E. D. Swinton, K.B.E., C.B.E., D.S.O.

The editor of *The Royal Tank Corps Journal* has also kindly given permission to draw material from his journal, and we have gladly availed ourselves of this.

Colonel John Buchan gave his consent to "The Call" being reproduced.

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We have also been greatly helped by the staff of the War Office Library, particularly Mr A. S. White, deputy librarian, and Mr A. T. Lowes, library assistant.

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INTRODUCTION

A special chapter of our work is from material supplied by Commander Oliver Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., and his valuable contribution is gratefully acknowledged.

Sergeant E. Hearn, M.M., has contributed a vivid personal narrative, for which we are grateful.

Some of the photographs have been specially supplied from the Royal Tank Corps Headquarters, and we have also to thank Mrs I. Ardern, for a snapshot taken in Bourlon Wood.

The author of the *Official History of the Tank Corps*, Major Clough Williams-Ellis, M.C., has been most kind in allowing us to refer to his book, and the proprietors of *Country Life* have kindly consented to quotations being made from this work, of which they are publishers. We are specially grateful to Lieutenant C. B. Arnold, of "Musical Box," for the graphic account of his day on 8th August 1928.

Colonel John Murray, D.S.O., the publisher of *Tanks in the Great War*, by Brigadier J. C. F. Fuller, C.B.E., D.S.O., has given his permission for the use of this book as a work of reference.

We are much indebted to the courtesy of these two houses.

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CHAPTER
ONE

THE OUTLINE

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CHAPTER ONE

The Outline

DURING one of the actions in which the Tank Corps was engaged a certain Section Commander hurried up to his Quartermaster, affectionately known as "Foxy":

"I must have some oil, Foxy; we are stone dry!"

"Hoil is it you want, Captain P.? Well, let me tell you what I've just heard on the phone. General Helles, 'e says to General 'Ankey: 'Tell Foxy to keep a heye on the hoil.'"

This story became one of the rallying cries of the Royal Tank Corps, and sets the tone of the following chapters.

Their scope is to bring out the romance and the humour of the Fighting Tanks rather than to emphasize either the strategic or tactical side of their War record, which is the field of a qualified military historian. This work does not claim to be in any way a technical treatise—that will be found in General Fuller's book, *The Record of the Tanks in the Great War*—nor pretend to rewrite the *Official History of the Tank Corps* by Williams-Ellis. Its aim is to tell a story without any special moral, but a story worth telling for its own sake.

Fighting Tanks, however, will be history in that it relates the actual experiences of those who took part in the actions, of the men who fought the Tanks, and of the Staff who planned the operations; and also some reminiscences of the lesser-known men who carried out the vital and dangerous work of salvage, and the dashing exploits of the armoured cars. Underlying these varied

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narratives there is heroism, often unrecognized; steadfastness undaunted by much dunderheaded criticism; and laughter in what was often a vale of woe. What the criticism was like during the early period can be readily gauged from a few extracts given below. These are taken more or less at random from a chapter of *The Crater of Mars*, by Ferdinand Tuohy. They express merely the personal view of that writer—a member of the Staff at G.H.Q. in 1916.

Mr Tuohy begins by quoting the words of a fellow-officer: "We're walking through Flers behind the Tanks!" Next, he speaks for himself: "Yet that evening all G.H.Q. was to know that the Tanks, as prophesied, had been an idiotic failure. . . . From this solitary and totally premature experiment the pundits of the hardened equine school arrived at the very satisfactory and quite antediluvian conclusion—Now let's hope they'll leave us alone with their damn silly inventions."

Later, he quotes another authority as saying that: "Into our C.-in-C.'s hands was given (if properly utilized) the greatest surprise weapon ever bestowed upon a military commander in time of war."

A further quotation from Mr Tuohy will illustrate the uphill work of the Tank Staff: "When the Tanks were again put—against the exhortations of all Tank officers—into the hopeless mud-sea of Passchendaele (where they, of course, stuck fast), G.H.Q. wrote home wanting to scrap the lot."

With one last note from a correspondent of Mr Tuohy we return to the Tanks' own story: "To condemn the Tanks as a fighting machine on the results of their Passchendaele martyrdom was about as sensible as doing away with the navy because battleships can't climb mountains."

The navy, however, is not a whit more a "silent" service than is the army, owing to the laws of discipline.

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The pen is a far more dangerous as well as more powerful weapon than the sword, as it often acts as a boomerang, especially when used by a serving soldier. A soldier's proper business is to defeat his lawful enemies, whilst the "gentle art of making" them amongst his own superiors is bad policy. The above criticisms therefore are really quoted as pointers to show the calibre of the Tank Corps men in the positions of responsibility, and not as cheap gibes at those who honestly doubted the practical value of the Tanks in the 1916-1919 campaigns.

Reverting to Fighting Tanks, which themselves seem to have been ditched in this digression, their story ought to rise above railway literature. All the fighting arms did splendidly, but some were less articulate than others.

The Tanks personnel have no lack of keenness, but in the nature of things there is one thing wanting—tradition. Other regiments and units possess the stimulus of a long and noble history made on many fields. Their very nicknames breathe the poetry of military annals: "The Chestnut Troop"; "The Fore and Aft"; "The Die-Hards"; "The Death and Glory Boys."

"Steady, the Buffs!" "Up Guards and at 'em"! are inspiring slogans. One must be unusually stolid not to be stirred by the memories they enshrine.

It is indeed a handicap to members of the Royal Tank Corps that they have no history beyond the present generation. Perhaps they, too, might reply in the words of the youth bored by having his youthfulness flung in his teeth: "That, at any rate, is a failing which grows less every year."

The Corps have made history epically within the short span of their corporate life. Only a tithe of what their men did from 1916 to 1919 has so far been set down. Every fresh story of reasoned courage and boyish humour recorded of their comrades will make to-day's "Army Benjaminites" more proudly conscious that they, too,

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have no mean heritage. Their War history is not a "cycle of Cathay"—it is an epitome of living dangerously and dying well. The Royal Tank Corps may not have a long pedigree, but at least it can reply with Napoleon: "Ancestors? I am an ancestor!" Or with Wren's more modest epitaph: *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice!*" —Passchendaele, Cambrai, Villers-Brétonneux, Hamel, Amiens, the Rhine.

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CHAPTER
T W O

IL DUCE

(*Major-General Sir Hugh Elles, K.C.M.G., C.B., D.S.O.*)

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CHAPTER TWO

Il Duce

EVERY new movement is an open target for ridicule, and the laughter of fools has only too often broken the hearts of pioneers. It is the old, old struggle between the wide-horizoned Seers and the myopic Realists.

The Tank sponsors, men with fresh ideas, encountered inevitably the immovable mass of the crowd with fixed ideas. Again, they had to face a Higher Command composed of men trained to judge soberly and by results. These were inevitably, if unconsciously, antagonistic to new-fangled inventions. For inventors are gamblers, and here the stakes were human lives. No G.H.Q. Staff can afford to risk not only their reputation but their country's safety on an untried weapon.

There were others, too, belonging by caste and Anno Domini to the establishment of military Conservancy, who would damn in advance anything threatening a radical change in the rules of the War Game.

Consequently the infant Tank Corps, an unwanted prodigy, was received in certain quarters in a spirit both timorous and superior, not dissimilar to that which once tried to crush Galileo. In the present case, the horse corresponds to the flat earth of his opponents. The Tank seemed to the shell-backs an effort to introduce a new mobility, revolving on its own axis, and emitting a poisonous smell.

Its adoption, they feared, would destroy the glamour of war, unaffected by the aeroplane. Gone would be the age-long co-operation of man and horse. "Scotland for

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ever!" and the "Light Brigade" would become coeval with Tamerlane and the Crusaders. By crude weight, the flat-earth champions won the first round against Galileo; so did the ring-masters against the Tanks. But Galileo had the last word, "It still turns"; and the Tanks, once they had got their second wind, rolled on, like Gilbert's terrestrial globe.

After their abortive birth on the Somme, in September 1916, the situation demanded imperatively a man—and the man, after anxious weeks, was found to grasp the nettle. (In view of the stinging sarcasm of the Home Front on the results of the first unrehearsed appearance this is by no means an exaggerated metaphor.)

Enough has already been said in the introductory chapter to show that the optimist who took over the command of the discredited Ironsides must himself possess the leadership of a Cromwell.

General Elles was at that time under forty, and a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Sappers on G.H.Q. Staff. He first became connected with the Tanks when he was sent home to make a report to Haig on their possibilities. The experimental machines, due to General Swinton's initiative and designed by Mr Tritton and Lieutenant Wilson, R.N.A.S., were being tried out in a hush-hush area at Elvedon, near Thetford. Elles's report must have been fairly favourable, as it brought about the early employment of Tanks.

Since the Somme offensive was decimating the splendid new material of Kitchener's armies without corresponding results, G.H.Q. decided to give the Tanks a trial against the nests of German machine guns. All the engineering experts who were working on the new arm were against this decision. It would have been, in their view, as sensible to use Wilbur and Orville Wright's first aeroplane to fly to India. But necessity forced the hands of the evolutionists. Something had to be done, and done at

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once, to stem the tide of casualties, whilst the Somme operations must be continued for the present, in order to relieve the pressure on the French at Verdun. Accordingly, the Tank was put in as a *deus ex machina*, but a very rough-and-ready machine at that!

Naturally, the choice of a Tank C.-in-C. was unusually difficult and limited, for obviously none of those whose advice had been disregarded could make ideal leaders. They were men with a grievance, so strong as to blind them to the general line of policy which must govern Haig working in co-operation with our French Allies. Tanks first went into action on 15th September 1916, at Flers, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Brough. On 29th September, Lieutenant-Colonel H. J. Elles was appointed Colonel Commanding the Heavy Section Machine Gun Corps, the name not being altered to Tank Corps until 28th June 1917.

A young enthusiastic officer was essential, one possessed of a thoroughly informed enthusiasm. He would have to command a personnel almost exclusively civilian, and so must have an elastic mind and "good hands." A disciplinarian with the saving grace of humour seemed the right combination, and it was found in Colonel Hugh Elles. He was Haig's final choice, and retained his post until he retired from the Corps in June 1928, the only superior officer in any corps to do so.

General Elles has himself, in his preface to the *Official History of the Tank Corps* by Williams-Ellis, summed up the inescapable dilemma on whose horns he was uncomfortably perched almost every time that the use of Tanks was proposed in the War—*i.e.* policy *versus* expediency:

"To wait until large numbers of every class of Tank were ready, and provided with adequately trained crews, and then to make a grand offensive," that was sound policy—the only policy—for an independent commander of the Tanks.

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But, as he aptly says, "Battles are not won with Tanks alone." G.H.Q. had many other factors to consider in framing a general plan of operations. Their strategy must take into consideration all arms, and be influenced by the Russian, Italian and, especially, the Home Fronts, as well as our own sector of Flanders or Artois.

To quote Elles again: "How to employ all available forces on predetermined dates in localities fixed for reasons other than their suitability as Tank country": that was the wider problem, and it was of inestimable advantage to the Tanks, and to this country as well, that in Elles we had a man big enough to appreciate this. As a sapper he knew the limits of machinery, and as a humane leader he knew equally well the limits of his men's endurance. The Passchendaele Tank tragedy would have broken a weaker man and made one of less resiliency and narrower outlook resign. Elles hung on, and kept his men's loyalty and his own head. Cambrai came opportunely, on 20th November 1917, as his justification, and nothing shows the temper of his steel better than the manner in which he met that first undoubted success of his leadership.

It was almost superhuman for a comparatively young man, naturally elated, not to crow. Even Job might have fallen to an "I told you so." As Elles says himself, it was the Tanks' fate, "up to the first Cambrai battle, to chip in, when we could, in conditions entirely unfavourable." When the Tanks did prove their mettle, on their proper terrain, to chip the equine school, still languishing at G.H.Q., would have been forgivable in an archangel.

The first point to be noted is that the Tank Corps was a citizen force: "Of its 20,000 men, not more than two or three per cent. were professional soldiers." Regulars predominated on H.Q. Staff, but there, too, as Colonel Fuller, the Chief of the Tank Corps Staff, states in the preface to his *Record of the Tanks in the Great War*, there

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were citizen-soldiers, like Captain Elliott Hotblack, who showed marked ability. To quote Elles again: "The whole of the Engineering and Administrative staffs, with one solitary exception, were drawn from civilians."

That called for very much greater skill in handling, as these men had not learned from boyhood the pride in, as well as the value of, discipline which is the finest flower of a military training. In war, of course, one company of really disciplined men is worth a whole battalion of undisciplined, however courageous. The advance of the Guards Division at the battle of Loos was a case in point. The German machine gunners cut down the front ranks, but the second merely stepped into their footprints and the unbroken wave of men rolled on. The enemy were both disciplined and courageous, but it was a discipline inferior in quality, and they bolted before the Guards reached even their front-line trenches. The morale of the Guards was the result of Caterham and the patient work of years.

General Elles had to substitute intensity of application for length of training, to evolve an *esprit de corps*, like the mediæval painter who evolved his camel "out of his own inner consciousness." For the Tank Corps personnel had no local associations, like a Territorial battalion or a Field Company of Engineers, round which to rally. The Tanks were mechanical, and lacked a soul, and even their bodies were not beautiful, as is an aeroplane or a field gun.

The *esprit de corps* came from the personalities of the Chief and the men he picked to command the different units. "Units were built up, not on any old-time tradition, but each one very much around the personality of its own Commanding Officer, and so shared the characters of the leaders." It was, perhaps, General Elles's greatest service to his Corps to win and retain their confidence in himself, leading to confidence in the men he placed over

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them, and, lastly, confidence in themselves and their machines. The discouraging start was not allowed to discourage the men, who were not to blame for it, but felt the recoil.

When we fail in the use of a mechanical device it is sheer human nature to abuse the particular instrument. Elles realized at once that the man behind the gun counts most when he has confidence in his gun as well as himself. He had a real faith in the fighting value of Tanks, and he made his whole Corps share it. " The strongest element in Tank success was the personnel's faith in their weapon " was his summary in 1919.

In appraising the character and policy of the Tank Corps Chief we have purposely stressed the part his judgment of human values had in creating an enthusiastic staff able to get the best out of their men.

" The knight in armour was again reinstated, his horse now a petrol engine and his lance a machine gun." This simile of Colonel Fuller's epitomizes the debonair band of brothers at Tanks Corps H.Q. They were knights in armourclads ! After all, the Tank was considerably less unwieldy than the knight's war-horse, hampered by his own and his rider's armour, and infinitely more effective. Kipling saw poetry in a marine engine, and Elles and his men lived it, with their " Mother " and " Musical Box." They polished and polished, until the poem became an epic at Cambrai and a pæan in the Grand Advance of 1918, culminating in the entry into Cologne of a Tank Corps unit as the advance-guard of the entire British forces.

Elles and the Tank Corps happy warriors had anything but a happy time before they won, by their dogged faith in their Tanks and undismayed sang-froid in tight corners, the respect of the Higher Command and the rank and file alike. Cromwell lacked a sense of humour or his descendants might be on the English throne to-day. It

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was the human touch in General Elles, in combination with the gay spirit of Cromwell's opposite number, Prince Rupert, which made him the "Winged Victory" of the Tanks. "Lord, give me a sense of humour" must have been his daily prayer, and nowhere else during the long-drawn campaign was it a more heartfelt petition than at Tank Corps H.Q.

Sappers are supposed to be either mad, married or Methody. Elles was indissolubly wedded to the Tank idea; mad as several Hatters (to his critics) about its potentialities, but with the saving grace of method in working out the Tanks' salvation. "It's dogged as does it."

A promising commander generally has the buskin as well as the baton in his knapsack. Brains are not the full equipment. Even gallery-play may be sound policy, especially when the gallery has to go into action.

A leader does not often lead a charge in our modern watertight-compartment wars, but he still has to be capable of doing so. That was what we meant about the dash of Prince Rupert in our G.O.C.'s constitution. After Passchendaele the whole Corps was suffering from virulent blues. Things had gone very badly with them. They wanted picking up. Cambrai was to be the pick-me-up. Then Elles's dramatic sense came into play. His brief order to the Corps on the eve of action was pregnant of great things: "I propose leading the attack of the Centre Division." He did it.

One goes back in thought to our King Edward III., sitting beside the mill overlooking Crécy. His eldest son is in great danger. Edward lets the Black Prince extricate himself. He, according to Shakespeare at any rate, knew the tonic value to the outnumbered English of the young Prince's winning his spurs unaided. It was a dramatic gamble: the father might have lost his son and England the battle. Neither happened. The Tank

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Corps might have lost its leader and with him the day at Cambrai, which is not so very distant from Crécy. Of course the club critics, who followed the War with pins and pin-pricks, were scandalized: "Good God, man, a C.-in-C. in a mêlée! What about the 1919 Class and the Land and Water Napoleon?" On that historic day the Tank Corps won an inspiration from its leader's panache, which waved steadily on through the rest of the campaign. The audacious little flag on the G.O.C.'s Tank was a danger-signal to himself and at the same time a beacon to the whole Corps. Danton's "*Il faut de l'audace et encore de l'audace et toujours de l'audace!*" rings rather theatrically these prosaic days. It had, however, precisely the effect the orator intended, and Elles's Cambrai gesture was no less dynamic than histrionic. One used to hear too often the simple-minded dweller in dug-outs grousing about the Staff in their cushy billets. This was largely occasioned by the tactless sartorial splendour of A.D.C.'s, who represented the visible Staff to the average subaltern. The latter was, of course, speaking rather from the heart than the head. Still, occasional leading does make leadership more real than uninterrupted directing from the rear. "Come on, you fellows! Give 'em hell!" brings your heart out of your boots much quicker than all the rounded periods of Ian Hamilton's best-worded General Order, or even Kipling's *Hymn before Action.*

History is not merely a chronicle of movements or facts, but also a study of what went before—the thoughts and characters of the men who were the factors precipitated later into the facts. That is why so much space has been given to the character of the Tank Corps leader. It helps us to understand better the character of the Tank Corps itself, which, over and above the petrol, was the motor-spirit of the Fighting Tanks! So many unexpected things were done in the Great War that what the Tanks

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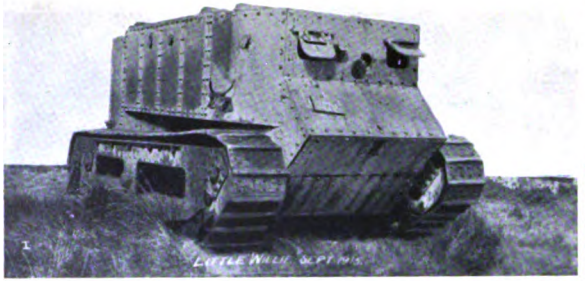

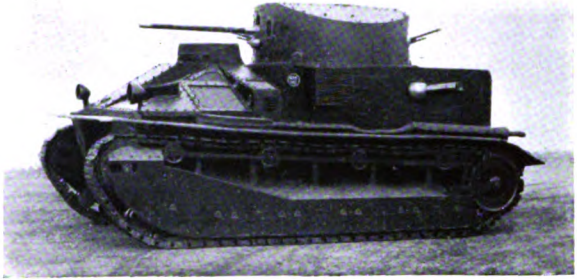

TYPES OF TANKS

Top left hand—" Little Willie." The First Tank.
Bottom left hand—" Mark V*." Infantry carrying, Amiens, 1918.
Top right hand—" Mark I." The first type to go into action.
Bottom right hand—" Mark II Medium." A tank of to-day.

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did has not the same relief it might on a less colourful canvas.

We are, as a nation, masterly in improvisation, and everything about the Tanks had to be improvised. Elles could not go back to anyone for models; he had no experience, no guide, as to what would happen when the model began to work. Right to the very end of the fighting the Tank Staff were scrapping, replacing, experimenting. Each new improvement meant a variation in tactics, a fresh orientation of training. For the men had in the first months to learn to overcome the weak points in their Tank by doing or not doing certain things. As soon as the machine had grown out of its blemishes itself, and had enlarged its activities, the crew had to accommodate themselves as well. It was like living in a one-roomed house which was continually expanding on the patent-bookcase principle. Anyone who has to train men knows what a difficulty lack of continuity creates.

The strong silent men of war are supposed to be of iron and inflexible fibre. They are not. A Robot would have been worse than useless in charge of the Robot Tanks. Elles was plastic, malleable—and as the Tanks evolved he went through the same process. Pig-iron is useful in its place—that is, as the rough material of the Tank—but the G.O.C. must be whippy steel.

Many of the personnel of the Tanks, as of other newly formed units, had no love of the "spit and polish" side of soldiering, and required tactful handling. One such, Major Z., was known and greatly loved throughout the whole Corps. He had gained the D.S.O. in the South African War, and a bar to it in this, besides the M.C., and yet his favourite boast was that he was not a soldier. He had a great contempt for pomp and ceremony and was very eccentric in his dress. He habitually went about in a private's tunic and slacks, no puttees, "ration" boots, a long, heavy piece of wood as a staff, and his

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pipe—which was always in his mouth—tied up with insulating tape.

He was once invited to dinner by the G.O.C. II. Corps. To the amazement of everyone he did not make any change in his usual garb for the occasion. He sat next to the General, and when his host took out his cigarette-case and offered it: "Have a cigarette, Z.?" said: "No, thank you, sir; if you don't mind, I'll have one of these." He then took a packet of "'Arf a Mo's" from his pocket, tore off the top, took one out and lighted it. The Staff wilted: the General smiled. He did not judge by appearances, neither did the G.O.C. Tank Corps. *Esse quam videri* was his criterion.

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CHAPTER
THREE

THE SOMME, 1916

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CHAPTER THREE

The Somme, 1916: The Curtain-Raiser

MARK I. type's greatest speed was three and a half miles per hour. The crews had had absolutely no experience of working with infantry and, what was equally important, the infantry had no idea whatever of the Tanks, not even of their appearance—and that was not inspiring. There had been much whispering, much nodding of some heads and shaking of other heads, and, on the whole, the shakers had it. This was the nebulous atmosphere in which the young dinosaurs came into the battle world.

They looked antediluvian, which was quite in keeping with the then prevailing type of military mind—at any rate, Whitehall-way—but they were really more than up-to-date. Like the Heavenly Twins, they were Signs of the Times, and Signs generally precede Times.

"We're walking through Flers behind the Tanks." That was "magnifique" but the sequel was not "la guerre." For the surprise was allowed to fizzle out like a cheap rocket, and the poor primitive Tanks were left behind as the stick. They did stick, and remained stuck —with short intervals of spasmodic activity—for nearly a year.

As already said, the Mark I.'s speed was three and a half miles per hour, its steering was difficult, and so was the observation.

Again, it was a conspicuous, slow-moving target. Sheer panic at first prevented the Bosche realizing its vulnerability from gun-fire, and so "We're walking through Flers behind the Tanks" rang out like the "G" in Gap.

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But there was only a handful of the early machines, most of which became ditched. That gave the enemy time to pull himself together, and then the rain came down, sent providentially by the German " lieber Gott " (according to the German Gospel) to " strafe " England.

The experts at home tore their hair—their planning, their patience, above all their phenomenal silence, seemed all to have been in vain. " The greatest surprise weapon " was no longer a surprise—and the enemy was only slightly stunned, instead of being pulverized.

Now he would have ample leisure to think out anti-Tank tactics.

When he (the Bosche) produced machine-gun-manned pill-boxes he built them by the thousand before springing them on us. The thin trickle of Tanks could be dammed —and was damned, with and without the " n."

To get back to the Mark I.'s—they rolled on laboriously at the pace of a pedestrian, but their limit was only ten and a half miles and then they reverted to the stationary. How awkward if this happened to be, as it generally did, just as they reached the front of a machine-gun nest garrisoned with a few hundred Bosches naturally irritated by watching their friends crushed before their eyes !

The new G.O.C., Colonel Elles, took over at the end of the first phase, on 29th September, when nine out of thirteen Tanks employed had been ditched on the 25th, and on the following morning only one had been able to attack.

The chalky mud of the Somme accounted for the rest. In this morass the last effort was made, on 18th November, in the Ancre area with nine Tanks. Three actually went into action near Saint-Pierre Divion, and were mud-stuck.

Two others supported an advance on the death-trap of Beaumont Hamel. Their support petered out, not through their fault, but owing to the hopeless shell-torn

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ground. On the morrow another trio made a last assault south of Beaumont Hamel on a strong point. One was outed by a direct hit and the survivors were bogged in the German front line. The crews, however, kept their heads and served their guns so effectively against the fortlet objective that the whole garrison of four hundred surrendered—a very stimulating finale to the Tanks' Curtain-Raiser.

On 29th September 1916, the day of Elles's appointment as Colonel Commandant, the decision was made to build a thousand Tanks. At last General Swinton's ideal seemed likely to materialize, but his actual plan of operations outlined in November 1914 was not followed until 1917. As a Sapper, Swinton did not expect "battleships would be required to climb mountains," which was equivalent to the demand made on the Mark I. over rain-sodden ground—"*Hinc illæ lachrymæ*," and the wanton waste of hard-trained Tank Corps officers and men in the ghastly months of the Passchendaele Slough of Despond.

But we are anticipating, and it must first be recorded how in the Somme drama Tank Corps men played no less gallant a rôle than the splendid Kitchener infantry.

There is a little story of which F Battalion are very proud as the lively preface of their battalion history. No account of it is given in the *Official History of the Tank Corps*, but that it was a good show is attested by quoting the words of the Tank Corps Commandant: "I consider this to be the best Tank performance up to date."

Second Lieutenant C. E. Storey, in command of Tank D14, was called on for a job of work by the G.O.C. 110th Brigade.

Grandecourt had given very little trouble the previous day, and the Tanks had done very well in capturing the position aimed at with practically no casualties to the infantry they supported (total damage, five). Now there

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were certain obstinate trenches to be cleared up—one of those operations which usually cost more than a set battle owing to the pluck and discipline of the German picked machine gunners. Enter the little Storey and his big D14! With no haste (which was, of course, mechanically impossible) D14 waddled along from one end of each trench in turn right along to the other end. It was like "John Calvin might have forged the same, enormous, certain, slow"—and the tank was quite as sure as the marine engine.

No Bosche remained after this devastating march. It was Destiny inexorable, Destiny spitting lead, with Storey a cool and quick-witted Controller.

It must not be supposed that there was no resistance: there always was when we came up against the bravest arm of the Bosches, but resistance was obliterated. It was not until his petrol was exhausted and only two of his crew remained unwounded that our Second Lieutenant ceased his morning parade. Between two and three hundred prisoners were his bag and the D.S.O. his guerdon.

Another episode was the work of the Reconnaissance Officer, Captain (now Brevet Lieut.-Col.) Elliott Hotblack.

It occurred on 18th October 1916. It was, perhaps, better known to the public than any other Tank Corps exploit, owing to Matania's picture of it in *The Sphere*. The tapes which were to guide the Tanks having been wiped out, the attack on the Triangle, a very formidable stronghold, was in danger of being held up. A Tank must clear the way, and unhappily it couldn't see the way in the pre-dawn mist without its tape.

It was perishingly cold, and the men were chafing to get on with it. The Tank, however, could not usefully make a move unless it also moved in the right direction. Then Hotblack volunteered to act as bear-leader. It positively snowed bullets, but none found a billet in him. Without hurry he moved forward, through and over

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shell-holes brimming with icy water, straight on to the Triangle, followed with affectionate nearness by the Tank. The latter got among the German infantry and set to work, now immune from the enemy gunners. Hotblack went back to report. That early-morning outing would have been enough for most men's stomach for adventure. However, it did not glut his appetite. Our infantry in another part of the line were, a little later, crying out like hungry infants for their Tank bottle.

There was no adequate system of signalling at that time in the Corps. So Hotblack took on "Signals" in his own person. Once more he hopped forward from hole to hole, and came up with the Tank thirsting for more fields to lay waste.

Hailing his iron Hairy he turned its nose to the proper quarter, and once more played the game of follow-my-leader back to our lines, this time in order to lead a fresh attack. As the phlegmatic military dispatch writes it: "He displayed great courage and determination throughout."

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CHAPTER
FOUR

THE SOMME, 1916

By

Captain J. L. Cottle, M.C., R.T.C.

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CHAPTER FOUR

The Somme, 1916: Detached Duty

By Captain J. L. Cottle, M.C., R.T.C.

ON another part of the Somme Front occurred the following example of utter devotion to duty which was to be the hall-mark of the Fighting Tanks.

A sixty-pounder in the wood blared into the night, a night furnished with a moon that was more often than not obscured by lazy rolling clouds. Flashes of flame stabbed outwards and upwards from the thickly wooded country around with uncanny regularity. The heavies were pretty busy. An occasional hostile shell gave warning of its own arrival by a long-drawn whistling shriek, which became louder as it approached, culminating in a giant's cough, vicious, rending. Farther down, away towards the enemy, could be heard the throbbing of the field guns. Still farther down, the faint hammer-blows of a machine gun were just audible. The noise was terrific.

No. 84, "The Crab," lurched around the corner of the wood, drew himself over an old disused grass-grown trench, which ran across his path, and moved noiselessly to a bank which edged the road. He breasted the bank, balanced himself to a nicety on the top, paused for an instant, and lowered his nose slowly and easily on to the road. Directly he touched he increased speed and shot across and away, making for the angle of the wood opposite him. The sixty-pounder crashed out again. The flash of the discharge lit up the ground in the immediate vicinity, showing for an instant clearly his mate, No. 85, "Lady Bird," slim-waisted and trim, who was following some fifty yards in the rear.

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She held on to his path, performed an almost similar evolution when she reached the bank, slipped on to the road and hurried on in his wake. The solitary watcher, a pipe clenched between his teeth, muttered to himself: "That's the stuff to give 'em." "Lady Bird's" dark form disappeared into the gloom of the far trees as he spoke.

. . . . . .

A Battery Commander in his dug-out amongst the foremost guns looked at his watch. "About time those fellows were passing," he said to himself.

A gunner subaltern poked his head down the entrance: "Ceased fire for a few minutes, sir! Tanks are about to cross us!" he reported.

The guns, their muzzles resting almost on the lips of the pits in which they had been cunningly hidden, were silent.

"The Crab" swung round, and fussed across at right-angles to the battery line of fire; he seemed in a hurry, as if he realized the importance of the delay he was causing. His mate slipped by after him, closer up now. They were too close to the enemy for lights.

"All clear, sir," reported the subaltern.

"Right, carry on!"

The field guns took up their song again.

. . . . . .

The Brigade Major hung up his telephone receiver as an orderly entered:

"Officer to see you, sir."

The Brigade Major was very tired. This was his third night without sleep. His face was pale and his eyes dark-rimmed. The attack was to commence in two hours. He had thought of everything: bombs, rations, water, liaison arrangements—he ticked them off mentally.

"Tank Officer, sir!"

A very oil-stained figure entered and saluted as the General came in from an inner room.

"Come up to report my Tanks, sir."

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"Splendid fellow! Excellent!" replied the great man, rubbing his hands together genially. "Good business," he added.

The electric bulbs in Brigade H.Q.'s dug-out gave a sudden jerk and a flicker as a heavy shell landed somewhere outside and above.

The Brigadier motioned the Tank Officer to a chair beside the table, on which was spread a huge map, at the same time sitting down himself. He then reached back for a pencil.

"Now your things are here at present," he began. "You'll start off at zero, and your proposed route across No Man's Land and their front system is from here to here, and then on to that point, isn't it?" He traced the pencil across the map as he spoke.

The two sat for some minutes, whilst the Brigade Major busied himself on matters of his own.

The faint tick-tack from the Signals office next door showed that matters were afoot. An occasional orderly or liaison officer clattered past the entrance of the Brigade office through the low-roofed tunnel which ran past it.

At last the General looked up, his pencil held to a point in enemy territory.

"If you can get across there, and scupper the machine guns in that farm, you'll be helping my infantry tremendously," he said. "Think you can?"

"I can't promise, sir. That trench in front of it, by all accounts and photographs, is a pretty big job to tackle."

The General turned and looked at him thoughtfully. "Deuced important that bit," he said, half to himself. "Look here, my boy," he went on, with sudden eagerness, "you'll do your best to chew that place up, won't you? I don't know what your infernal things can or can't do, but you'll have a damned good shot at it?"

"You can count on that, sir," replied the oil-stained one.

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They rose together.

" Have a drink of some sort before you go ? " from the General, with a twinkle in his eye.

The Tank Officer shouldered his way out into the night through the usual crowd which assembles at any infantry B.H.Q. before a battle — runners, signallers, orderlies and a batman or two. He walked briskly down the duck-boards and disappeared into a trench. " The Crab " and " Lady Bird " waited his return. The night had now become intensely still.

" Crazy Farm has to be tackled bald-headed ! " " The Crab's " master, hot-foot from Brigade, shot out this remark to the assembled crews who were lying about around their Tanks. " Where's Mr Hammond ? "

" Right here, old man," replied his subordinate, the proud possessor of " The Crab's " mate.

" Say, old man," he went on. " Guess we've got as much chance of crossing that trench before Crazy Farm as a celluloid dog in Hades has of getting out with his shop varnish on."

There was a general laugh.

" Good for you, Canada. It's got to be done, anyhow. The General says it'll take too long to get around the flank, so it's straight over the high jump for us."

" We've got forty minutes to wait here," he went on. " My final orders are : ' Lady Bird ' to lead on the route as laid down ; I follow with ' The Crab ' fifty yards behind. Brigade time—check your watches, you fellows —is exactly twenty-one and a half minutes past two. Got that, everyone ? "

He turned and addressed Hammond :

" Topping moon to-night. Let's lie down here and have a cigarette whilst the men have their tea."

And so they waited, these two with their men, guardedly smoking, quietly chatting. There remained only five more minutes.

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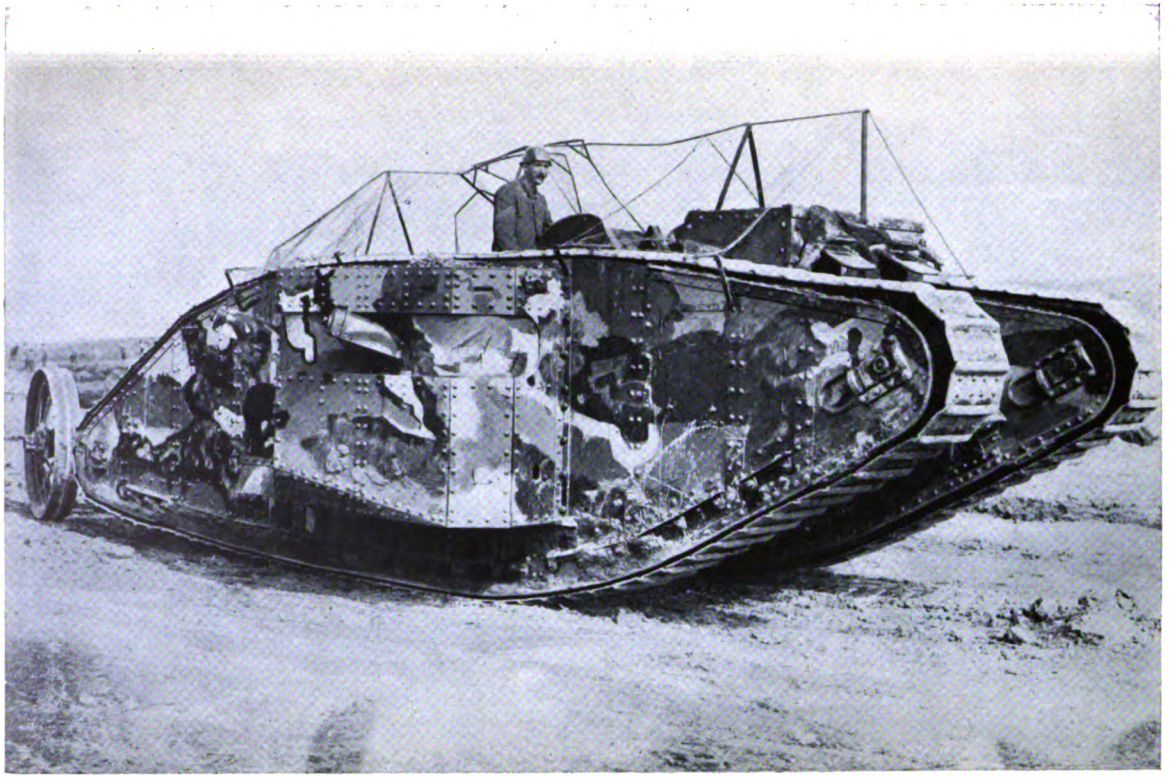

FLERS, SEPTEMBER 15TH, 1916

Mark I going into action for the first time. The rear wheels were used for steering, but were discarded in the later types. Mark I was a slow mover and very clumsy.

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"Fall in!"

The men and officers clambered into their machines, doors were shut and men inside strained on the crank handles. Then the inferno broke loose, as dawn was suggesting itself on the horizon to the left.

"Lady Bird" started as if for a long race, steadily and slowly, gathering herself together as she went. Ahead was uproar and confusion. The very hills before her seemed as if on fire. Reserve trenches crammed with waiting men cheered her as she passed over them, drawn grey faces were uplifted to her tough sides.

"Give 'em hell!" they shouted. Little dark stumbling figures had to be caught up seven or eight hundred yards ahead, and passed. They were the first wave.

Nose-dip, side-slip, down and up and over; sandbags toppling to right and left, crushing, crushing and roaring with glee, on she went. Wire screaming as it jammed in her tracks, scarring the grey paint on her sides, front-line wire, No Man's Land wire, all crushed and battered and scraped—these were her milestones.

"'Ware wounded; 'ware communication trenches": on to the block-house wall well ahead—dust and smoke, blood and noise—this was her setting, her life's work.

She shook herself out and through the first mess. She led—the stumbling figures were no longer before her. On her right a shell-hole held a chattering machine gun; she charged, slipping and crushing as she went. She reached it, nose sky-high on the lip, dived, and the chatterer was still. A shapeless grey-and-red mass was caught in the tangled wire in her tracks, pulled over her broad back and re-crushed. She scrambled out and switched off on to her original path, red-tracked and wreathed in wire. Eyes from "The Crab," keeping steadily on behind, watched her progress, prayed for her success, wished her luck and held on, straining against the dust and gloom ahead.

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They were running now—field-grey figures ahead were running forward. Some advanced, their arms held above their heads, shouting, but their shouts were inaudible. On and on, stouter work was ahead. Crazy Farm loomed in the distance—a few blackened tree-stumps and a litter of bricks wreathed in smoke and bursting shells.

"Lady Bird" turned slowly towards her objective. A hostile plane swooping low dropped flaming red stars over her—an indicator for the opposing guns. The ground gaped before her; she was covered in earth and stones. Another pitched ten yards behind her. Her gunners spat dust and earth fragments from their mouths, blown in past the gun-sights. Down a slight slope she approached the big trench which guarded the farm.

"Let her have it, all out!" shouted Hammond, his mouth close to the driver's ear; "get a good bite on the other side."

A shell pitched right ahead of him as he spoke. "Lady Bird," smothered in dust and debris, charged the gaping trench. Over, over, straight out shot her nose. Foot by foot, she reached for the opposite side. Too far, she missed it, as she reached her point of balance and toppled forward. Still hope—she bit into the straight wall before her, churning gaps from it, but to no purpose. She was held; she could go neither way.

She tried to reverse, but the engine refused; she tried the forward speed, but only succeeded in piling fresh loads of earth on her head.

The while, "The Crab," followed by lines of cheering khaki-clad men, their bayonets gleaming blue in the early morning light, held steadily on his way.

"Neutral!" yelled Hammond, as he clambered out of his seat.

He clambered through the trap-door out on to her back, stood up, his back to the enemy, and signalled to those in "The Crab."

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THE ARRAS OFFENSIVE, APRIL 10TH, 1917

The tank " Iron Duke " passing through Arras on its way into action.

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"This way," he motioned, as "The Crab" came slowly on.

"Over me, over me!" he shouted, beckoning. They could not hear him, but they understood. They saw him hug his hand frantically as it was hit from behind, and then pitch forward on hands and knees—shot through the head.

Hammond's corporal, poking his head through the trap-door to see where his officer had gone, withdrew it hurriedly as "The Crab" lowered himself on to "Lady Bird's" back. It was a splendid piece of driving. This was "The Crab's" innings. He hauled himself over, slowly, inch by inch, his track to her track. Now he was over, up, and had gained the other side, relieving his mate of his vast weight.

Then he went mad: all his guns blazed at once as he charged the heap of scattered brick from which a hail of bullets issued, pock-marking his side. He steered around it once, shooting from every angle. He turned, headed for and clambered over it, crushing in emplacements and cellars beneath him.

It was too much for them; they came out, such as were left. The waiting infantry, springing from their temporary shelter in shell-hole and trench, charged forward at the double, joined by "Lady Bird's" eager crew, anxious to be in at the death.

. . . . . .

A very hot but elated General Officer, a whisky-and-soda balanced in his hand, leant against "The Crab."

It was nearly midday. He pushed back his steel helmet and mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

"You luxurious young beggars," he chuckled. "A fine bit of work," he hastened to add.

"The Crab's" master did not answer.

"The Crab," motionless on his objective, his right track looped above his nose, seemed as if to be saying,

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"I'm here. I'm knocked out, but this bit of ground is mine."

"A damnably good bit of work," insisted the General. "I shall send in a report to your Commanding Officer."

"It was him—his—Hammond's idea," gulped the other. "Write it about him, sir."

The General extended his hand and grasped the other's. "Of course I will."

"Thank God we've got stuff like this on our side," he murmured, as he walked away.

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CHAPTER
F I V E

CHIAROSCURO OF PASSCHENDAELE

From Material supplied by Captain T. Price, D.S.O., M.C.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Chiaroscuro of Passchendaele

TO those who survived the months July to December 1917 in the Ypres Salient, it is a memory of a dun-grey mist flecked with blood and mud—the mud prevailing. It was the triumph of King Mud; all-conquering mud, clinging, viscous slime, against which neither man nor machine could wring more than an hour's progress by a day's agony of toil. The third battle of Ypres has been called the "Battle of the Ridges"—it might more truly be described as the purgatory of the marshes. Men were as frequently drowned as sniped, and, as Haig himself stated in dispatches, the British forces encountered their stiffest resistance from the elements—rain and soil. These were a more formidable enemy than even the cunningly entrenched Germans.

The tons of mud collected by the Tanks were not of such an adhesive kind as the mud slung at them by disgruntled Commanders of other units, seeking a scapegoat for the untoward happenings of plans gone awry.

The men who floundered through the successive bogs, or trod warily the greasy duck-boards on their daily "lawful occasions," gradually became acclimatized: but they were only carrying their own weight plus equipment. A Mark IV. Tank was obviously out of drawing in that picture. It was like an elephant in a quicksand. There was nothing solid for the tracks to grip.

A section of them were huddled together under tarpaulins on the Rue de Brielen, at Ypres, close to H.Q. of the 16th Brigade of Heavy Artillery. They were

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waiting for the clouds to empty themselves—which event was apparently to coincide with the Day of Judgment. Then the Tank crews were "for it." These latter were highly trained and stout-hearted, ready to do their damnedest even if they were only "landships and not submarines." The gunners had sufficient engineering experience to appreciate the feelings of the Tank men.

No one proposed that 15 in. howitzers should be dragged across country to the crest of Friezenburg and through the swamps up to Broodseinde; but the powers seemingly did expect a like miracle to be worked by the Tank Corps Staff.

It is too dismal a record to give in detail the history of Passchendaele from the Tanks' angle—so acute is the angle—but all that can be attempted is to pick out a few episodes. One of these, the first Tank V.C., glows as a torch over the swamp-sea. The flame of sacrifice indeed burned steadily in the Salient from first to third Ypres, and in the spring of 1918; but human endurance was never more strained than in the long struggle for the key-point of Passchendaele. In that epic the infantry had, without a doubt, the worst of it every way, but at least their martyrdom was crowned at last. The Tanks, however, for the most part, gathered the bitter conviction that their failures were not even regarded as splendid failures—they were just futile. Besides the common lot of losing their best men, they were losing as well their, as yet, insecure footing as a fighting corps.

In spite of these gloomy months of unrecognized labour and foresight, the Tank Corps Staff and crews kept intact their faith in their arm. Once their bogged machines could reach *terra firma* again they would show how far they could go where the "going was good."

The intolerable gruelling they got at Passchendaele may even have keyed them up for their Day, so soon to dawn, on 20th November.

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What was to be a vital branch of the Corps was first organized during these operations—Salvage. A ditched Tank was too valuable to leave derelict, and so strenuous efforts were always made to salve it. The unditching apparatus, at first primitive, was gradually perfected, and some of the best brains of the Corps were devoted to training a special personnel. Their work was highly dangerous as well as highly skilled, and at times not a little humorous. One of their duties was to buoy Tanks which had submerged (like the genuine article at sea). This was done with a species of life-buoy, but there is no instance on record of a bell-buoy being used—a regrettable omission.

The following affair came into the day's work of that branch of the Tank Corps.

A Tank Corps Salvage Officer gazed dismally round the Ypres Salient between Verlorenhoek and Saint-Julien. He had been slaving all night, with ditching-beams and curses, to rouse the derelict Tanks from their liquid lairs. It was the " morning after " one of our costly pushes, and his job was to clear up the mess which strategy, less common-sense, had left behind. He had not breakfasted, and saw no chance of an early lunch. The watery sun revealed nothing but the unpleasant. Weary groups of foot-sloggers were staggering over the rotting duck-boards; weary gunners were dragging at the wheels of 6 in. howitzers, which could not be expected to fire under water.

A group of gigantic West Indian heavy gunners were huddled together close by him, shivering both from the raw air and from each successive burst of the Bosche " morning hate." Enter a Sergeant-Major, ex-police superintendent, now the mainstay of a battery of the 16th Brigade. He looked at the officer and then turned to a hole beside him and shouted down: " Breakfast ready? "

A head appeared: " All ready, Major! "

The B.S.M. walked up to the officer and saluted. " Our

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counter-batteries are just going to begin, sir. Would you care to use our dug-out till the show is over?"

"Thanks very much, Sergeant-Major. I should love to sit on something dry for ten minutes." Squatting in the entrance of the dug-out, he was very soon getting down to bacon and steaming tea and the world seemed brighter. It was the Sergeant-Major's breakfast; the latter had work up above to do.

Sergeant-Major B. then went up to the coloured Colonials. Picking out the least scared, he jerked out: "Can you dance?"

"Oh yes, sah! We all dance very well."

"Well, dance here," indicating a squelchy piece of ground. For twenty minutes their enormous feet, in ammunition boots, pounded the ground, and, with clapping of hands and shouting, the scared ones forgot their cold and terror. They were doing something at which they were experts, much more enlivening than lifting 9·2 shells out of one into another muddy patch, which was their daily task. The Sergeant-Major was an unconscious psychologist, and had not been a policeman for twenty years for nothing. Captain X., full to bursting, heaved himself out of the dug-out and saw fully the last movement of this Ypres "Twentysome." Chuckling, he lit his pipe, and tramped back to his salvage dump with reborn enthusiasm for his job. The Sergeant-Major gazed kindly at the perspiring darkies, and gratefully at the hard-trodden square of clay. He produced fifty fags, patted a broad shoulder or two, and then he, too, went down and ate what was left over. A coffee-coloured subaltern soon turned up and marched off the West Indians, who now stepped out bravely and even crooned a ditty.

That is a true story, as I happen to be that Salvage officer. In most cases the salving following the various pushes did not do much more than register unattained

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objectives, but there was one notable Tank advance in the northern sector of the Salient, on 19th August, on the XVIII. Corps Front. This was an epos in little, and its protagonist deserves an introduction.

The Owls' Mount.—Major Strongbow has the largest chest expansion of any R.T.C. commissioned officer. He is very useful in a rugger scrum, and once, when challenged, succeeded in throwing the champion wrestler of the Russian Army (when they were still our Allies, at Bovington). His voice is both strident and carrying, and his language is purple in parts—and these parts are in large patches. He is the man for a forlorn hope, having no nerves and enjoying hard knocks. The Corps were in the dumps—*in profundis*. It was three-quarters' way through August 1917, and so far the Tanks had apparently achieved nothing in the Passchendaele Push but much abuse from Corps Commanders. They were Nobody's Darling, and so were left unloved and untended in No Man's Land, to be billets for wandering detachments. The Fifth Army Staff hated the very sound, as well as smell, of a Tank. The drawing-room and smoking-room experts of Mayfair and Pall Mall were chanting, for once united, a solemn requiem over the children of Swinton and D'Eyncourt's fanatical brains: "Scrap them, scrap them, and let us get down to clean Victorian soldiering!" It was a near thing for the Tanks. Their fate hung on a young lady's eyelash, or perhaps an old woman's moustache. The Owl's Mount saved their bacon, and it was Major Strongbow who fried it.

Colonel Baker-Carr, commanding the 1st Tank Brigade, was lucky in having Sir Ivor Maxse as G.O.C. XVIII. Corps. The latter could see considerably farther than his nose, and was not strangled by red tape and choked with textbooks. He allowed Colonel Baker-Carr, whose unit would pay the piper, to call the tune. So there was no artillery barrage to make the wily Bosche even more

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wideawake, only a smoke-barrage, which might mean anything or nothing. The Tanks did not charge forward head down like a bull (to whom their Commander, as a matter of fact, has a family likeness), but crept round the edge of the smoke-cloud, and stung the hornet pill-boxes where their sting zoologically ought to have been. It took them from 4.45 A.M. to 6 A.M. to complete this forward manœuvre, and in twenty-five minutes Major Strongbow and his pack had touched down four times, and each time they took a pill-box.

Hillock Farm went first, its garrison prudently and incontinently fading away into the passing smoke. Then two Tanks attacked the Owl's Mount and put forty rounds of their six-pounders into its exposed stern. The survivors of this pill-storm surrendered a little later to our infantry. Once more packing his men, the Major went for Triangle Farm. Here the Germans resisted with considerable pluck, but our infantry, following, wiped them all out. The last goal was scored from a drop-kick, for the Tank attacking the Cockcroft got ditched within fifty yards of the dunghill. This was too much for Major Strongbow. Thrusting his head out of the driver's window, he roared at the Bosche such tremendous imprecations, accompanied by a burst from every lethal weapon in the Tank, including his own revolver, that the whole garrison of over a hundred withdrew in very open disorder. Very few escaped the Tank's Lewis guns and those of the infantry. Major Strongbow was awarded the D.S.O., and the Tank Corps H.Q. Staff rubbed its hands, invited Sir Ivor to dinner, and, gleefully muttering to each other, "That'll stop their jeremiads for a bit," straightway began working out the strategy of the battle of Cambrai.

A Dental Dilemma.—For weeks after this the Tanks ate the bread of affliction in such indigestible bulk that the last episode did little to leaven the dough of depression, but as September soaked itself out they were

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ordered to prepare for another holocaust. But before the October attacks, which were as tragical to the Tanks as to the infantry, two incidents occurred illustrating the truth that war is tragi-comic.

It was as dark as a night after twenty hours' rain—and consequently filled with steamy mist—could possibly be. No stars and no moon were visible, and dark shapes were moving through the murk, casting, owing to their greater density, a shadow on the lighter background. It was a company of Tanks moving into position. An officer walked in front of each, with the cheerful thought at the back of his mind that if he stumbled his Tank would not necessarily stop, and that it weighed many tons. However, they "proceeded" (as one always did in the late war) to the rendezvous, which was carpeted with the outpourings of German gas-shells. It is generally warm inside a tank, on that occasion warmer still—in fact, what Corporal Smith called sanguinarily 'ot, as he, with the rest of the crew, were wearing their gas-masks. Suddenly a muffled shout came through the driving window: "Corporal, come out. I want you!" It was Lieutenant Boney's voice, but strangely altered. Smith tumbled out, and was immediately grasped by his O.C., who had removed his gas-mask: "Take it off now: the Bosches have ceased firing." Still, even without the mask, the Lieutenant's voice had a muffled sound, as though he were masticating Macconnochie. Then in a hoarse whisper he said, close to his Corporal's ear: "Lost my adjectival teeth, and damned if I'll go into action without 'em. Sneezed 'em out, I did! I left my gas-mask to mark the spot. Come along and help to find the blasted things!"

It was his and his O.C.'s hunt, and off they went like terriers after a rat, nose to the ground. They were soon hot on the scent, and the Corporal was the first to find!

It was, however, a deceased Bosche, but he was miraculously provided with "Teeth, set of, false," complete.

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These Smith extracted and handed triumphantly to Lieutenant Boney. He smelt them and threw them away. "That is not Wilfred," he murmured sadly, and went on searching on hands and knees. They dare not show a light—the enemy were too close and too wakeful. It was a question of feeling their way. The other Tanks were cursing audibly, but our sleuths took no notice. At long last, after they had covered miles, radiating from the fixed point of the Lieutenant's gas-mask, the Corporal placed his hand heavily on something sharp and hard, and with a joyful whoop he dug out of the mud the missing set.

Lieutenant Boney clutched them tight, rammed them home, and then, in firm but whispered tones, assured Corporal Smith that if ever the true story of this night leaked out, his chances of a sergeant's stripe would be about as rosy as his (the Lieutenant's) were of becoming G.O.C. Tank Corps.

This was one of many mishaps unrecorded in war histories, but none the less actual.

A Good Drive.—On one of the zero days a collection of Staff Officers, gunners, sappers, padres, and other not-for-its, found themselves on the top of Kemmel Hill, which was a grand stand for that day's show. The Salient was ringed with flashes from thousands of guns of all calibres, and through the fog of smoke and gas we endeavoured to follow our advance through field-glasses. A good deal of imagination was then brought into play, and an equal amount employed in subsequently describing what the watchers thought they saw.

Far to the north, over against the notorious Pommern Redoubt, a lone Tank waddled forward across "very difficult ground." The crew were entirely engaged in keeping the engine and themselves in equilibrium. Steering was really in the hands of Providence, and in any case they couldn't see where they were going. The route

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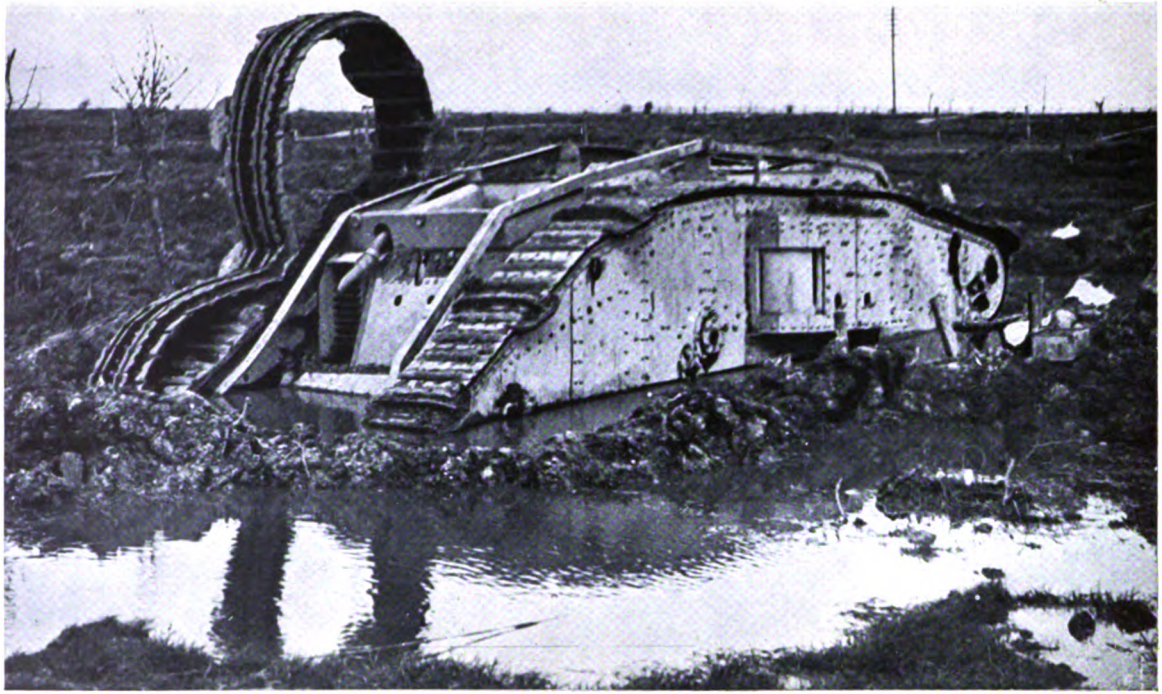

"ST. JULIEN," OCTOBER 12TH, 1917

This is the sort of country over which the tanks were expected to advance at the third Battle of Ypres. Note the track blown off by gun fire.

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was not taped (it is of no use taping a swamp), so someone had to act as scoutmaster. He was the Tanks' C.O., and was an easy mark to follow, and incidentally to hit, from his unusual bulk. No Tank trap has yet been constructed that would admit him frontways, as his shoulder-girth is an outsize.

He moved on, dripping perspiration and profanity against the blighters who had ordered his mud-bath, until his Tank was close to his objective, when he turned with the curt order, " Give 'em socks ! " and the Tank proceeded to do so. He then dispersed the crews of, and silenced, four separate German machine guns, one of which he captured himself (apparently by his own unaided weight) and thus materially assisted the infantry in the capture of Pommern Redoubt, which had held up the attack for a considerable time. That burly subaltern was Temporary Lieutenant Cyril J. H. Tolley, and for his day's work he received an M.C.

The Polecat.—At dawn, on 4th October, a tremendous barrage was laid down on the Anzac Corps Front. It was inspiring, and on the orchestral wave of sound, where 12 in. howitzers and 9·45 naval guns were the bassoons and the trombones, and the 4·5's and field guns provided the higher notes, one was lifted out of self. It was impossible to feel afraid. All personal feeling was eliminated, absorbed in the continuous roar which made the ground quiver and filled the air with a deep hum like some cosmic dynamo.

In the chilly dawn preceding this a Tank came waddling across the broken ground, followed at due intervals by fifteen colleagues, male and female. The C.O. and the Second-in-Command trudged along beside the leading Tank. A hopeful shell fell close to them. The C.O. promptly threw himself on Mother Earth—a smelly and unfriendly mother—at least he threw himself where he had every right to expect earth (but you never can tell

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in the Ypres Salient) and it so happened that the spot he chose to fall on was a culvert, filled with green slime and water—mostly the former. He disappeared from view with a gurgle, and the leading Tank rolled majestically forward on to the culvert, and stopped.

Fortunately the sides of the culvert held, and the Captain rushed to the front of the Tank and shouted to the driver news of what had happened, and urged him to move his Tank with all possible speed. Unfortunately the Tank Commander, a very slow and deliberate Scotsman, was driving himself.

It is very difficult at the best of times to make anyone in a Mark IV. Tank hear what is said from outside when the engine is running, and the presence of Lieutenant B. in the driver's seat did not make it any easier.

After what seemed an age, however, he put his head out of the driving-window and said slowly: "Am I to understand ye to say that the Major is under ma tank?"

"Yes! And for God's sake move it!"

He allowed this to sink in for a few minutes and then:

"And shall I be moving it forward or backward, do you think?"

Words failed, and the Captain rushed round to the back door, where fortunately he found Sergeant C., a man of resource.

"Sergeant C.!" he shouted, "the Major is under the Tank. For the love of Mike push Mr B. out of the driver's seat and drive it off!"

The Sergeant lost no time, and the Tank lumbered off, disclosing Major X. up to his neck in green slime, but otherwise unharmed. We who were in his immediate vicinity for the rest of the action knew something worse than polecats.

Clement Robertson's V.C.—The last act of Passchendaele was also the stage of the first Tank V.C. Every detail had been meticulously rehearsed, and the actors trained

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"CLAPHAM JUNCTION," SEPTEMBER 26TH, 1917

One of the mud-clogged advances of the tanks supported by infantry in the Ypres Salient. The tank in the foreground has been covered with a camouflage net.

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to the point of exhaustion. If thoughtfulness in preparation and selfless consecration to duty could have met their deserts, 4th October would have been a Cup Day for the Tanks. The actual attack lasted only a few hours, after costing weeks of Staff work and many invaluable lives. It was a wedge-headed thrust of heavy masses of infantry, following a colossal artillery preparation, and the Tanks had to supply the wedge-head. Very few machines came through. Some are there to-day, and their crews, amongst whom lies Captain Clement Robertson, V.C., 1st Battalion.

Late on the night of 3rd October he finished preparing the route for his Tanks to go into action against Reutel, on which he was working for three days and nights, under heavy shell-fire. At 8 A.M. on 4th October he brought them all safely to the starting-point. His zero-hour was 6 A.M., and he led the van, after continuous lack of rest since 30th September. The infantry were moving steadily forward, alternately swimming and jumping over the rain-sodden quagmire from edge to edge of the shell-holes. What had once been a road was now, of course, a mass of broken cobbles, muck and debris, human and mechanical.

Over this Via Dolorosa Captain Robertson moved forward, and on foot. If a Tank missed the way it missed the battle too, for there was no recovery once the so-called track was left.

Strait was the way and narrow, and Robertson walked alone in front of his line of Tanks, otherwise not one would have escaped submersion.

He was no light-hearted boy doing a stunt. He knew what it meant, but it was up to him to bring his Tanks into action at any and every cost.

The Bosches were quite aware of the Tanks' approach, and were bracketing the road with shells.

In addition, an intense and well-directed machine-gun

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barrage was sweeping the line of their advance. Captain Robertson had not a one-per-cent. chance of survival where he was, the Tank door was close behind him, and he had already done almost all that was possible, humanly speaking.

But for the time he rose above the human individual and incarnated the spirit of the Corps.

The Tanks must prove their worth, and what if another Tank Corps officer had to die in order that the Corps might fulfil itself? He went on until he fell, but his objective was reached by the men into whom he had infused his own determination. In the bald phraseology of the official record "the Tanks in consequence were enabled to fight a very successful action."

That "he deliberately sacrificed his life to make certain the success of his tanks" gave special point to his General's subsequent order before Cambrai that "in the light of past experience I leave the good name of the Corps with great confidence in your hands." In General Elles's words: "Captain Clement Robertson's achievement was the bravest action throughout the campaign of a member of the Royal Tank Corps." He received a posthumous V.C., and "only to the foolish did he seem to die." To his comrades "his name liveth for evermore."

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CHAPTER
S I X

CAMBRAI—ON LES AURA

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CHAPTER SIX

Cambrai—On les aura

THE R.T.C. Annual Dinner is always held on Cambrai Day—20th November—just as the regiments engaged at Minden have their yearly celebration on Minden Day. Cambrai is the Tanks' smashing *apologia pro vita sua* to all the cavillers and doubters.

As Mars is an ultra-conservative deity, the formation adopted at Cambrai was that of Philip of Macedon—the Macedonian phalanx—not dissimilar to the wedge-thrust which Cæsar's legionaries used in driving home their attacks. Everything had been thought out—no "muddling through," no trusting to luck, but sound thinking and unremitting practice for weeks before. It was touch and go for the whole future of the Tanks. If Cambrai turned out to be the sequel of Passchendaele, then finis to the Corps' fighting history—at any rate in that campaign.

Fortunately, the Third Army Chief, General Byng, was sympathetic, and, as a sportsman, decided to give the Tanks a sporting chance. Therefore there was no lengthy barrage, no huge concentration of supplies just behind the line. Further, the Bosche Staff, aware of the Tanks' apparent ineffectiveness during the previous four months of the third Ypres engagements, had a decidedly poor opinion of their capabilities.

So the Tank Corps Staff had the enemy in the ideal frame of mind for handing out a surprise-packet, somewhat like that of Conan Doyle's Brigadier Gerard when he encountered the diminutive pugilist.

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The work of moving the Tanks from the Salient, as well as those in reserve, was done without any leakage either to the enemy or to our own men. Dust was freely thrown into too-open eyes and cunning stories poured into long ears. The most difficult part of Tank Staff work was indeed to cope with the almost childish inquisitiveness of other arms, not by any means only in the subordinate ranks. Secrecy was the cement of their plan, without which it would inevitably become unstuck.

One night two British officers were dining in a small hotel near Albert. There was nothing about them to indicate Staff rank, and they wore R.E. badges. The room was pretty full and near by two or three senior infantry officers were discussing things, including tanks. One remarked:

"Well, if any of those damned things are going to be used you always know it."

The two first-mentioned officers exchanged glances, but said nothing. The hills round Albert were stiff with Tanks, which had been brought there by night and carefully camouflaged. The two silent ones were the Tank Corps G.O.C. and his D.A.A.Q.M.G.—Brigadier-General Elles and Colonel Uzielli. From this grouping area the Tanks were transported by rail, for which arrangements had been worked out by Colonel G. S. A. Gray, the chief railway officer of the Third Army. Twelve trains per night were employed, fully loaded up with Tanks, and the whole striking force folded their tents and silently stole away to the assembly area. It was masterly, because the operations were in the hands of masters, each of whom knew his job and did not waste priceless time in trying to teach others to do theirs.

Genius is sometimes displayed in an infinite capacity for minding one's own business, but not often in the conduct of military operations. Cambrai was, in con-

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ception and in execution, a crow's flight—a straight line to the objective, and no side-shows.

The Bosche thought the Tanks had shot their bolt, and Elles's move came as a blasting bolt from the blue. It was to be essentially a Tank show, and the infantry were to be in support and the cavalry in reserve, yearning, as they did through the weary trench-war years, for one chance of getting the rust off their spurs.

Zero hour was 6.20 A.M., and 1000 guns opened up to the second, but long before that, in the late November dawn, the three Brigades, of 42 Tanks each, had moved up to their jumping-off positions along the black-and-white taped routes. In the centre was the G.O.C.'s tank, "Hilda," complete with flag, and inside her the G.O.C. himself. As another general would have expressed it: "Your General has his eye on you." The T.C. General had his spare eye on the enemy. With his head thrust through the trap-door, Elles spotted likely targets, which he communicated to the gunner below him by tapping his own Morse signals with his feet on the perspiring gunner's ribs.

There was one specially obstinate Bosche field gun, worked by a single officer, which accounted for 16 Tanks, as they, in turn, topped the ridge before Flesquières, before he was finally killed. This action was the subject of a special mention by Sir Douglas Haig in his Cambrai dispatch: "The great bravery of this officer aroused the admiration of all ranks." One wonders if Ludendorff was equally appreciative of the pluck of the Tank Corps crews, who went on over that ridge, with death waiting for them as soon as they came against the sky-line.

Mark IV.'s were used, and, in addition to their ordinary equipment, each carried on its back a fascine (the word itself recalling once more the Romans) of osiers bound with chains compressed under immense hydraulic force.

It was an ingenious application of the snail with its

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house—in this case the Tank with its portable bridge. The Tanks went over in threes, of which the leader, after crushing its way through the broad belts of wire in No Man's Land, did not cross the first enemy trench, but wheeled to the left. The second went straight on to the trench itself, and shot its bundle over its head into the gap, crossed, and in its turn wheeled also to the left. The third Tank then forged ahead to the support-trench and dropped its fascine. The other two followed, and one of them, the original leader, had still a fascine in hand for eventualities—canals or ditches. For once, all went according to plan, and the wide Hindenburg Line was overrun, and collapsed like a child's castle of bricks. It was a pretty bit of work, and even the German Providence was caught nodding. According to our previous experiences, there ought to have followed a fortnight's unbroken downpour, or a series of petrol-dump explosions, just to spoil everything and parallel the days following the fine Anzac advance of the previous 4th October, at Broodseinde.

As a matter of history the magnificent Cambrai victory of the Tanks could not be fully exploited, as the going had been almost too good, and the infantry could not stay the course, being man and not machine driven. The gap, too, was not wide enough for the cavalry.

It was the nastiest knock the Bosche had so far taken, except the attack on Messines, of which the success was primarily due to the stunning effect of 1,000,000 lb. of ammonal going off directly under their front-line system. At Messines the Germans were like the refugees from the last eruption of Etna.

At Cambrai it was motive not eruptive power—the swoop of an eagle rather than the blow of a Nasymth hammer. Brains were used, pluck and initiative, human skill—not a convulsion of nature.

The effectiveness of the Tanks in crushing the barbed

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wire laid open paths where the following infantry had free passage. What they thought can be gauged from the following extract from a Highlander's letter:

" . . . In most places the wire was absolutely down and flat; even at the worst one could pass over in comfort with a little judicious exercise of the 'heather step.' "

A further extract from this letter shows the many uses of a Tank.

That evening, during one of my tours round the line, I had gone over to a Tank stuck in one sector and learnt that it had run out of petrol. The Tank remained with us most of the night. Cigarettes were running short; my own private " iron rations " had received several nasty jolts, and one was communing with oneself upon what a life it was. I was roused from my reverie by one of the Platoon Commanders, McLellan, stumbling down the stairs and into the dug-out. He had a most mysterious air, and into my mind came the thought: " Has anything gone wrong? " He assured me everything was O.K. including the Tank Corps. I asked him what the devil he was talking about.

He replied: " Would you like a drink? "

Would I like a drink! No grub, nothing to drink, only a few cigarettes left, wet almost through and through, the future unknown, and—would I like a drink? . . . *Would I like a drink!*

When I had stopped swallowing hard, and could command my voice, I said: " Don't be a —— fool! Of course I would like a drink; but where are we going to get it? "

From behind his back McLellan produced a bottle with a very familiar label. The bottle was three-parts full of a yellowy golden liquid, which, almost on the verge of tears, I discovered experimentally to be " mountain dew." Now, in the middle of the battle of Cambrai, where

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did it come from? Bottles of whisky do not grow on trees, nor do they form part of an artillery barrage.

I demanded the truth from McLellan; and this is it:

"You know that Tank stuck out on our left? I went over and had a crack with the officer, and he asked if I would like a drink. He gave me a good stiff glass of whisky, and when I was leaving asked also if I would like to take some away. I jumped at the offer, and here it is!"

"But, McLellan, probably you've taken his last drop of whisky."

"Good Lord, no! They've got dam' nearly a distillery on board!"

HAMMOND—THE COW CATCHER

A Bosche Town-Major stole two cows,
He had a "winning nature."
The Mayor was forced his pets to house
And be their *Alma Mater.*

Enter the Tanks, exit the Hun,
Deserting his cherished Mairie,
His cows, alas! they could not run,
So Hammond ran the Dairy.

[After the victory of Cambrai, Major Hammond, R.T.C., was presented by the Maire of Masnières with two cows, left behind by the German Town-Major in his hurried flight. They remained with Major Hammond for quite a time, and were devoted to him.—*Official History.*]

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CHAPTER SEVEN

ON LES A

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CHAPTER SEVEN

On les a

SO many individual acts of gallantry marked the 20th of November that it is difficult to make a choice, and in describing the doings of Lieutenant William Rupprecht Bion we are only taking him as typical. He was a fine type, of whom General Elles said later: "This is a very gallant officer, who on more than one occasion has been brought to notice."

He was hotly engaged near Flesquières, where the enemy's resistance was notably courageous. They had placed their machine guns very strongly in the wood, and certain buildings on the eastern outskirts of the village, and were holding our infantry. This was a focal point in our advance, and Bion was fully aware of this, but had the bad luck to get in the line of fire of a German howitzer, which effectually accounted for his Tank. He at once evacuated his men, and all machine guns still working, and manned a German communication trench. This meant that he was pretty well ringed by the enemy. From there, Bion proceeded to pay back the Bosche machine guns by establishing a strong post on their own ground. Meanwhile a weak platoon of the 5th Gordons, which had apparently lost its way, turned up, and Bion roped them in to man his fort.

One particular German machine gun was annoying him and he could not locate it from the trench. Leaving shelter, Bion climbed to the top of his derelict Tank, dragging a Lewis gun with him. Taking cover behind the fascine, still in position, he opened fire on the obnoxious gunner.

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From behind his fascine he could in safety spot all movements of troops, our own as well as the enemy's, and shortly afterwards saw other Tanks coming up. Without hesitation Bion left his fascine and, under heavy fire, hurried off to the advancing Tanks to give them precise directions.

These reinforcements apparently moved off, and the Germans, who had gone to ground, took fresh heart and, to the number of two hundred, advanced to wipe out Bion and his rash sixteen men. The latter gave them such a series of machine-gun bursts that the attack never materialized and petered tamely out. But that lavish use of his ammunition exhausted it, and Bion was in a hole, figuratively as well as actually.

In an engagement, fortunately, many things are discarded, and Bion, hunting round the neighbourhood of his trench, found an enemy machine gun in perfect condition and well supplied with ammunition.

This kept him going until the arrival of A Company the 6th Seaforth Highlanders. Captain Edwards, the Company Commander, was talking to Bion when he was shot through the head. The latter then took over command until relieved by the arrival of a Seaforth subaltern. Bion remained at his post until 2 P.M., having been on duty from before the dawn, and in practically continuous action since 6.20 A.M. The C.O. of the Seaforths, Colonel Macdonald, arrived a little later, and ordered Bion to the rear. There is no doubt whatever that his coolness and self-devotion saved the situation in this sector, and fully earned the D.S.O.

Cambrai added a second V.C. to that of Captain Robertson. This was won by Captain Richard William Leslie Wain, commanding a section of Tanks of the 1st Battalion. Whilst leading an attack on a German strong point near Marcoing, he was checked by a direct hit on his Tank. Nearly all the crew were killed outright,

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and Captain Wain and one man, the only survivors, were both badly wounded. Our infantry were consequently definitely held up, and suffering from the concentrated machine-gun fire from the strong point. Though weakened by loss of blood, Captain Wain, by sheer will-power, pulled himself together, unshipped his Lewis gun, and, leaving the protection of his Tank, advanced alone against the enemy. Getting his gun into position he trained it on the strong point, opened a well-directed fire, and, single-handed, took the strong point, capturing as well about half of the garrison.

Most of the enemy were retiring, but continued to fire. Captain Wain was all but done in, and might have left the work of overcoming further resistance to others, but such was his sense of duty that he carried on, using a rifle he had picked up, until at length he was fatally wounded by a shot through the head. Even then he refused the help of stretcher-bearers until he had cleared every one of the enemy out of their strong point.

By four o'clock the Tanks had done their part, and reached their farthest objectives. On the analogy of an infantry engagement the next stage would be run by the reserves—fresh troops. The Tanks had no reserves: every available man and machine had been thrown in. It was proof of uncommon grit and discipline that on 23rd November the same units again attacked, and successfully, at Bourlon Wood, supporting the 40th Division. In the words of Major-General Sir John Ponsonby, G.O.C. the Division:

"At Bourlon Wood they [the Tank Corps] were really instrumental in giving us—I mean the 40th Division—a very successful advance on the German lines at Cambrai."

General Ponsonby's men were fiercely engaged in fighting their way through the thick undergrowth of this comparatively unshelled wood, and lost very heavily indeed. This engagement is described in very great detail

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in the 40th Division history, but by some inadvertence no mention of the support given to the infantry by the Tanks is there made. Again quoting General Ponsonby: "As regards Cambrai, November 1917, the 40th Division was supported by fifty Tanks. These Tanks were distributed between the two leading Brigades (the 119th and the 121st)." That, of course, implies that they had to meet the enemy at their freshest. "The Tanks worked well—there were several knocked out by the enemy artillery—but on the other hand, the remainder reached the objective." The foregoing evidence of the value of Tanks as an infantry support is specially interesting as coming from this Divisional Commander. For General Ponsonby was one of the senior officers detailed by Army H.Q. to attend a private demonstration before the battles of the Somme in 1916. "This was held in the back areas, and a good many Divisional and Brigadier Generals attended—as well as the H.Q. Staff. We were all much impressed, but considered the pace the Tanks went to be slow."

During the Somme fighting General Ponsonby commanded a Brigade of the Guards Division, and writes *re* the first Tanks:

"At the attack on Les Boeufs, on 16th September 1916, the Guards Division, with the 6th Division on their right, were supported by a contingent of Tanks. How many I cannot remember, but I should imagine the number to be about twelve, or perhaps a few more. On this occasion the Tanks did not come up to the expectations that had been formed. The ground, with the recent heavy rains —and the whole of the ground over which the attack took place—was a mass of big shell-holes. In fact, I believe only one Tank succeeded in supporting the infantry in capturing the German advanced trenches."

The type of Tank used at that demonstration and on the Somme was Mark I., whilst the Tank which fought

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"THUS FAR AND NO FARTHER FOR THE MOMENT"

"Hyacinth" (Mark IV) in the German second line near Ribecourt, Battle of Cambrai, November 20th, 1917.
The infantry in occupation of the trench are the 1st Leicesters.

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UNIV. OF MICH.

AN AEROPLANE MAP OF THE CAMBRAI BATTLE

The large black patch in the background is Bourlon Wood and in the bottom left-hand corner will be seen a bit of Havrincourt Wood. The Hindenburg line runs right across the foreground of the photograph, and behind it half-right is Flesquières.

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at Cambrai, Mark IV., was a greatly improved type, and the General's opinion endorses this.

As a matter of fact, nearly every Divisional Commander at Cambrai was more than satisfied with the Tank Corps tactics and their resultant—the piercing of the whole of the German front line. The only part where this was not achieved was, according to General Fuller —Chief of the Tank Corp Staff—" where a Divisional Commander had scrapped the Tank Corps tactics and devised a system of his own." The entourage of the C.-in-C. stayed lukewarm, and in the natural course water becomes very shortly stone-cold. Anyhow, there was a temporary lull in the insistent parrot-cries at G.H.Q. of the " Scrap the lot " clique encaged there.

As already pointed out, the Cambrai action, from the strictly Tank point of view, ended at 4 P.M. on 20th November.

In the later phases the Tanks were really supporting and not giving a lead to the infantry. Their crews were tired men and there were no reserves. General Ponsonby's very brief summary of the events of their gallant work with his Division three days later covers many notable individual performances hidden in the thickets of Bourlon Wood and lying " doggo " in the pages of that Division's history.

On the 30th, however, the whole situation was reversed, and the initiative passed to the Germans. Their Army Commander in that sector was General von der Warwitz, and he had at his disposal considerable reinforcements, most opportunely arrived.

He conceived the bold plan of an encircling move of the acute salient created by the Tanks' overwhelming victory, which, if successful, would have meant the capture of our III. and IV. Corps.

The advancing Germans were badly hammered on the northern side of the salient, but drove in our defences

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on the south and captured Villers, Gueslain and Gouzeaucourt.

"At 9.55 A.M. on the 30th a telephone message from the III. Corps H.Q. warned the 2nd Brigade (of Tanks) of the German attack, and, though many machines were out of condition, by 12.40 P.M. twenty-two Tanks of B Battalion moved off, followed very shortly by fourteen of A Battalion." Meanwhile, the Waterloo slogan of "Up Guards and at 'em!" had once more been tried, and Gouzeaucourt was restored to us by the Guards Division. The detachment of Tanks joined them, and "the Tanks were pushed out as a screen before the village. By 2 P.M. twenty Tanks of H Battalion moved up also in support. Early on 1st December, with the Guards and the 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions, the 2nd Brigade Tanks counter-attacked against Villers, Gueslain and Gouzeaucourt Wood, and cleared the wood."

The number of German dead and machine guns found there was indisputable evidence of the value the enemy set on retaining the wood, whose capture was another rung in the steep ladder of recognition the Tank Corps had to climb.

It was, as Fuller says, "a remarkable feat that at 8 A.M. on the 30th not one machine of the 2nd Brigade was fit in equipment for action, and yet by 6 A.M. on 1st December no fewer than seventy-three Tanks had been launched against the enemy with decisive effect."

Fuller rightly insists that the Tanks at Cambrai accomplished in twelve hours a penetration of the German line which took, in the third battle of Ypres, three months of the dourest fighting. "From a base of 13,000 yards in width a penetration was made of 10,000 yards . . . 8000 prisoners and 100 guns were captured. These prisoners alone were nearly double the total casualties of our III. and IV. Corps during the first day of the action."

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What this actually represents in the saving of life can be readily checked by referring back to the casualty lists of the first Somme infantry attacks, unaided by Tanks.

"The attacking infantry (at Cambrai) were assisted by 690 officers and 8500 other ranks of the Tank Corps, *i.e.* (only) the strength of a strong infantry brigade."

The man in the machine was almost equal to 20 man-power as a striking force, and if he became a casualty the loss was only one-twentieth in the same ratio. Further, there was the vast economy of shells which, to the tune of millions of pounds, had in previous actions to be fired in order to cut the enemy's fields of wire. The Tanks flattened out the wire at the trifling cost of only petrol and oil. The old wasteful preliminary bombardment, lasting sometimes for days, was eliminated at Cambrai. Apart from the artillery barrage at zero hour, all the disorganizing of the enemy's resistance was done by the Tanks themselves; and the gratuitous advertisement of our next move was at the same time withheld. Repeating General Swinton's words: "The greatest surprise weapon ever placed in the hands of a C.-in-C." was for once a deadly bombshell and not a damp squib.

The two days, 30th November and 1st December, though lacking any spectacular touch, were filled with acts of splendid heroism disguised as "carrying out orders." The Guards had gone out of the line, preparatory to a rest. The Tanks, too, had been withdrawn. They were badly in need of refitting, and their crews badly in need of recuperation. Both had done well.

Suddenly the Germans launched a fresh attack, as already referred to, and so complete was the surprise at first that they had reached some of our Staff in their billets whilst still wearing their pyjamas. Many of our guns, even 60 pounders, were captured, and for the

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moment it was both a dangerous and a humiliating sequel to the glorious victory of the 20th November.

The Guards were curtly ordered back again, and a message was sent to the 2nd Brigade of the Tanks to get ready at once to support them. This message was only received by Brigadier-General Courage at 10 A.M. on the 30th. His Tanks were, so to speak, also in their pyjamas, and their petrol tanks empty, and yet within two hours he had three battalions in action at Gouzeaucourt.

What actually happened in the fierce wood fighting it is not easy to trace, but when the Tanks had finished their work the German offensive on that sector was more than arrested, it was pulverized.

They carried on cheerfully the following day at Gauche Wood, and in *The Guards Division in the Great War* there is a brief note: "Tanks proved of the greatest assistance to the infantry"—which in this case was a company of the 3rd Coldstream. G.H.Q. was a little more effusive. In describing the attacks on Villers, Gueslain and Gauche by the Guards, the C.-in-C. states that "the Tanks were in a great measure responsible for the capture of the Wood"; and adds these pregnant words: "The great value of the Tanks in the offensive has been conclusively proved." To the Tanks this was the underlying purpose of Cambrai—to convince G.H.Q. of their offensive value—and each succeeding action drove the lesson home.

Again, in the Guards Division history casual mention is made of the great help that the 3rd Battalion Coldstream received from a lone Tank, which accounted for some fifteen machine guns, with their crews, that had been holding up the battalion's advance. The officer in command of that Tank was Captain G. A. Grounds, a Section Commander of H Battalion. Like all the rest of the Corps he had been anticipating a day or two's rest after a fierce fortnight of intensive preparation and days

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of tough action, when he had been given the sharp order, "Prepare for immediate action," and here he was back again to work.

He started the day, 1st December, very badly, by having three of his four Tanks outed by good Bosche shooting. However, the crews were not badly hurt, and Captain Grounds evacuated them and turned them into Lewis-gun sections, of which he took the lead. Having chosen his ground, he posted them carefully, and then went off alone to get in touch with the nearest infantry unit—the Welsh Guards.

The enemy was close, in fact when he took to a trench it was their front line. Swinging round a traverse, Captain Grounds found himself facing a party of the enemy. He had only his revolver and they were twenty to one. Luckily they were unusual Germans (being untidy) who had been holding his part of the trench, and had left a supply of bombs lying on the trench flooring. Grounds was a first-rate shot, and in five minutes he had routed his opponents single-handed.

Having completed his task he fell in with his surviving Tank and took it into action, but first, fired by his bombing adventure, he obtained the support of a party of the 8rd Coldstream Guards to act as his bombers, and led them forward.

Together they captured two hundred yards of fully manned trenches, obliterated fifteen machine guns and took a crowd of prisoners.

The point of this episode is the adaptability of the Tank's personnel. They are gunners, bombers, machine gunners, mechanics, wireless experts, revolver shots, reconnaisance officers and, at a pinch, sappers, pioneers and Company Commanders of infantry.

The next chapter is the story of an anonymous Tank Commander, at least under a *nom de guerre*. It is the tale of an eye-witness.

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CHAPTER
EIGHT

THE CALL

By

Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Call: The Tale of a Tank

By Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C.

"FOUR hours exactly and then our day dawns."

"Your watch is wrong; it's now 2.20, and sunrise is at 7.30—that is five hours, ten minutes. One must be accurate in these matters."

"I meant four hours to zero hour, the beginning of the great battle—the battle of Cambrai I expect they will call it. That's our day; the Tank Corps lives or dies on this show. If we succeed we shall multiply and fill the earth—if we have another failure the Tanks are going to be abolished."

"Sounds dramatic; but who told you? The Post Corporal? Or did it come from as high an authority as the Orderly Room Sergeant?"

This conversation was being carried on between two Tank Section Commanders as they were leading their Tanks, through the darkness, from the wood where they had been hidden during the previous day to their "starting line," where they were to join the infantry and launch the attack on the great Hindenburg line just before dawn.

The route of the Tanks was over easy ground, and a black-and-white tape (the special Tank Corps tape) had been laid down at dusk to make sure that no Tank could go astray in the dark. The machines had been moving very slowly, their engines just "ticking over," in order to make as little noise as possible. Sound carries so far on still nights, and nothing must disturb the enemy.

The two Section Commanders were strolling along, following the tape; behind each of them walked an

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orderly, and farther back the dim light half revealed a procession of monsters. In front of each Tank walked the subaltern who commanded the Tank, and through the open flap in the front of the machine the head of each driver could be seen peering at the back of his officer through the darkness. All this was taking place at some distance from the enemy; before they reached the German lines, however, each officer would get into his Tank, flaps would be shut and doors secured. Then the great machines would glide into action, and no human being would be visible as a target for the enemy to shoot at. It is just this fact—that there is "no one visible to shoot at"—which intensifies the terror of an advancing Tank. Even the brave begin to falter when all they can do is to fire at armour-plate in the faint hope that they may damage the man behind it.

The conversation continues:

"Half way up this rise is where we stop and fill up with petrol."

"Yes; you had better stop your section now. I will let mine go on another one hundred yards, so as to keep the buses scattered in case the Huns put over a few shells to liven up the night."

One after another the great machines come to a standstill, engines are switched off, and the crews clamber out and start filling up with petrol, that has been placed in readiness in an old disused trench.

After having made sure that the petrol tank is full, and having told the crews to rest for a bit, the officers collect in groups in some old trenches and talk quietly amongst themselves. Everyone is already dog-tired: all having been up throughout the night for several nights getting the Tanks on to and off the trains by which they travelled from Flanders to the Cambrai Front. Then there had been approach marches by night and reconnaissances and conferences by day; but now hardly

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anyone even tries to sleep, though there are several hours before the Tanks need creep up to their final positions for the attack.

The Major who commands the company arrives, and joins his Section Commander.

"You have had your watches synchronized?" he asks.

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sure you've filled right up with petrol?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are all the buses running well?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has each Tank Commander got his maps?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! All seems to be going splendidly. . . . I have just been to the Infantry Brigade; the leading troops are nearly all in position, and, so far, not a sign from the Hun. This time we really are going to surprise him. If he has any suspicion he'll never believe the attack is to be launched without any preliminary bombardment. We have never attacked before without one."

"Heavens above! What an awful noise X. Company are making. I should think the Kaiser 'at the Front' in Berlin must hear it. They are a hopeless lot," complains one of the Section Commanders.

"I expect they were saying just the same of us when we were moving," upheld the engineer, who prided himself on being able "to see things from other people's point of view."

An orderly arrives with an envelope for the Company Commander. He reads the message by the light of an electric torch, the light of which is dimmed by a khaki handkerchief.

"Good Lord!" he mutters.

Everyone looks up. "What has gone wrong now?" is the thought in all their minds.

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"General Elles is going to lead the attack himself—in a Tank."

There is a pause.

"How splendid!"

"Well, that's all right!"

"What are you worried about?"

Everyone speaks at once.

"I'm worried," the Major replies, "because it seems such a big risk, such an unnecessary risk—and I'm worried about the reason," he continues slowly. "The other day I was at Divisional H.Q. and some senior officers were talking about the attack, and one of them said: 'I hear the powers that be are anxious about the Tank crews; they wonder if they are for it, if they will really go, because they have had the hell of a hammering in the Ypres Salient for the last few months. Elles himself is confident, but then, of course, he would be.' It made my blood boil to hear them," continued the Company Commander, "but on thinking it over afterwards I realized they had a perfect right to talk like that. What worries me now is that I am wondering if that is why the General is leading the Tanks himself. I am wondering if he, too, has doubts and thinks this step necessary to hearten us up."

One of the Section Commanders picked up the sheet of paper which the Major had dropped, and read slowly:

SPECIAL ORDER NO. 6

(1) To-morrow the Tank Corps will have the chance, for which it has been waiting for many months, to operate on good going in the van of the battle.

(2) All that hard work and ingenuity can achieve has been done in the way of preparation.

(3) It remains for Unit Commanders and for Tank crews to complete the work by judgment and pluck in the battle itself.

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(4) In the light of past experience I leave the good name of the Corps with great confidence in your hands.

(5) I propose leading the attack of the centre division.

(*Signed*) HUGH ELLES,
B.-G. Commanding Tank Corps.

19*th November* 1917.

"That does not sound like lack of confidence. After all, why should he stay behind? It's true that in modern warfare a General's place is with his reserves, but we have no reserves. Every Tank that can turn a wheel is going in."

"Yes; it's win or lose for the Tank Corps, and in a few hours we shall know." It is the Section Commander who had already referred to the subject who is talking, pleased with the underlying drama in the situation.

There is a long pause. Everyone is absorbed in his own thoughts, and is relieved when the silence is broken by the arrival of a sergeant.

"Please, sir, the 'Quarter' wants to know if you would like to change your mind—about the extra day's rations. There is still time, he says."

"Where is he?" asks the Major.

"Just there, by my Tank, sir."

"Send him here at once."

Presently a portly outline appears through the gloom. It is Quartermaster Higgins. He looks an odd figure, with a tin hat many sizes too small perched on a huge round head. What his age is no one knows, or if they do they take care not to say, for some army forms must have been filled up recently with a statement about his age which might have been true twenty years ago, but which was now not quite accurate—to say the least. He had been known as "Old Higgins" in the South African War, and in peace time had been considered one of the "mingiest of quartermasters." Now he spends all his

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skill—which is considerable—in wangling extras for his "boys."

"What are you doing here, Higgins?" asked the Major. "Show us what the poet calls that 'swift and delicate movement' of yours, and get back, and don't let me catch you up the line till I send for you."

"I thought, sir——"

"No, I won't. Not another ounce of stuff do you put into those unfortunate Tanks; you've nearly filled them up already with boxes of rations. Heaven knows what's underneath! I saw raisins, lemons and chocolate in the top layer—to say nothing of the rum. Who lets you have all the stuff I can't imagine!"

The "Quarter" looked pleased at this tribute to his powers of getting more than he was entitled to, and then added simply:

"Nothing's good enough for them as is going over the top, sir. I wish I could go over with them."

"About turn!" said the Major, and the "Quarter" disappeared slowly, looking the very embodiment of a human supply-tank.

As he passed along the line of Tanks he could be heard telling the men, in an enormous hoarse whisper, of the supper they were going to get when they came out of the battle.

Weesh bang! A shell burst just beyond the last Tank and in front of the Quartermaster. He hurries forward and then disappears. Is he hit? No, he is in the shell crater, searching steadily for the fuse. Several more shells burst close by, but the search continues; then a smile of triumph spreads over that vast face, and the ungainly figure lumbers on. The Quartermaster has another souvenir of the Great War!

"Why aren't you all resting? You will be dog-tired to-morrow," says the Major. But no one does so, though there is no doubt about being dog-tired to-morrow. They

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are that already. "It's quite time that Reconnaissance Officer of mine was back to report that the tape has been laid across our front line all right," the Major continues, feeling that trivial conversation was better than those long tense silences. "An officer from each section went with him, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir."

"I hope to heaven he is not carrying the tape right across No Man's Land and tying it on to the enemy's wire just in front of each machine-gun emplacement that has been located. Funny thing about Reconnaissance Officers—they are all mad. I've had three—all mad. I've talked to lots of officers and they all say the same thing—they've never had a Reconnaissance Officer who was quite sane. Nearly all suffer from the same delusion: think they are invulnerable—love to walk about in the open in front of a Tank—in the enemy's line for preference. I wish I knew if this taping was finished. I think I'll go——"

"Taping all correct, sir," says the voice of the Reconnaissance Officer at his elbow.

The Major jumps—jumps perceptibly, and is annoyed at this display of nerves. "I wish you would not crawl about like that! How long have you been here?" This from the Major irritably.

"Only a few minutes, sir. You were talking about Reconnaissance Officers. I did not like to interrupt. Best piece of taping that's been done, sir," he continues serenely.

The Major turns away, saying: "Each Section Commander will read General Elles's Special Order to his section. Don't get the men bunched together, though."

The officers scatter, and the Major remains for a few minutes gazing at the sky. The blue and gold vault holds the old-time witchery that is always new.

"Curious thing," he muses; "the Creator makes the

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heavens like this when, after all, any old sky would have done, and then—then comes this filthy slaughter. Why doesn't He——"

A German star-shell soars into the sky and hangs in mid-air, paling all the stars with its garish efficiency. The Major looks at his watch; a Tank engine starts up, and the time for profitless musing is over.

There follows another period of stealthy activity. Tanks advance slowly. Officers check the positions of the tapes, talk in a whisper to the infantry who are to attack with them, and finally send in their reports that all is well.

The stars begin to pale and the air grows moist and chill. Who will ever forget those war-time hours before dawn? Everyone shivers a good deal and complains of the cold, to reassure himself that it's the chill in the air and not the chill in his heart that is causing the shivers. Rum is served out. The Tanks creep forward again, and then our artillery barrage opens with a crash.

The attack has begun!

The light is still dim, but from the high ground stretches a line of Tanks as far as can be seen, with one Tank in the centre, slightly ahead of the rest, carrying the General—and the Tank Corps flag.

A new era in warfare has begun—but it begins, as most eras do, with but a few of the far-sighted to recognize it.

Lieutenant Barton had transferred from the infantry to the Tank Corps, as had many others, not because he imagined that it would be a safer job, but in order to get "some of his own back." He had many old scores to pay off. Twice he had seen his platoon shot to pieces on the enemy's wire; then his only brother had been killed. There had seemed little prospect of damaging the enemy nearly as much as they could damage him as long as that enemy could sit behind wire and use his machine guns.

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THE TANKS' BIGGEST TRENCH

This photograph of the Canal du Nord was taken on the 27th September, 1918. The tanks had to tackle this canal in both the first and second Battles of Cambrai. Note the tanks resting in the background and the German prisoners in the foreground carrying back their wounded.

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The Tanks seemed to offer better chances; now, for the first time, he was going into action in a Tank.

His machine was the leading Tank of the section of four, and was now approaching the enemy outpost, the destruction of which formed his first job.

Barton's heart was full of fears; not common fears about his own personal safety, but fears of failure: fear that "something would go wrong with the works," that the Tank would break down; fear that he would miss his way in the strange country; and fear that the Tank would fail to cross that great ditch, the much-discussed Hindenburg Line. Already one of these fears seemed to be not without foundation: our front line was far behind, but still there was no sign of the outpost. Should he turn back? Should he—— There! Right under the front of the Tank was a movement in a short bit of shallow trench: then, quite distinctly, hands were lifted, half-a-dozen pairs of hands, fluttering beseechingly.

"Straight ahead!" Barton shouted in the driver's ear, and the Tank spanned the small trench and crushed the enemy's machine gun into the earth without the least effort. The Tank was swung to the left and halted. A short pause. What was the next move to be? One could not shoot down those unhappy supplicants in cold blood. Barton had been taught some German words of command to use on such occasions as this, but his memory failed him—not a word could he remember. He scrambled out of his Tank and made undignified signs to the Germans to fall in and march back to the British lines. Just as they started our leading infantry arrived and Barton hurriedly climbed back into his place and started again. "Is it all going to be as easy as this—just a walk-over?" he wondered.

Now the Tank is entering the sea of wire entanglement which protects the main line.

The enemy is opening fire on the Tank and some

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splashes of molten metal creep in through the chinks in the armour-plates and flash across the dim interior. Barton, however, was prepared for this.

"They're not bullets coming through: it's only splash," he shouted reassuringly to the crew. "Steady now! Get her quite straight," he instructed the driver, for there, in front of them, is the vast-looking gulf of Hindenburg's front trench.

No Germans could be seen in the trench, but the Tank guns opened fire into it. The light had been improving fast, and to the right and left leading Tanks of neighbouring sections could be seen approaching the trench, whilst behind were the main-body Tanks accompanied by small parties of infantry. So far all is going without a hitch.

Barton's Tank is now close up to a straight bit of trench, and all is ready for the attempt to cross it. He examines the situation carefully through the observation slots and then pulls a release spring: a huge round fascine of wood, weighing a ton, which had been carried on the nose of the Tank, falls forward and into the trench. That vast bundle of brushwood has been a great worry to all concerned, and the crew give a sigh of relief, like Christian dropping his burden, when it is safely deposited in its goal at the bottom of the trench.

The Tank now advances carefully, its nose stretching far out into space over the trench till the point of balance is reached, then slowly the forepart of the machine slips forward; down and down it goes, till the Tank seems to be standing on its head. At last a bump: the nose has touched the far side of the trench. The driver immediately opens out the throttle and the engine roars—then the Tank begins to lift itself; up and up it goes, till it is standing on its tail. The tail, however, is resting on the fascine which has been dropped into the trench.

The fascine serves its purpose truly: the tracks of the

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Tank have a firm grip at the critical moment, and with a last heave the Tank reaches the level on the far side of the trench.

"We're over!" ejaculated three of the crew at the same time.

"Sure and we're over!" solemnly repeated the Sergeant, though no one can hear what is said.

They now turn and move along the trench to make sure that none of the enemy are firing at the advancing infantry. The Germans are down in their dug-outs, or at the bottom of the trench, where the Tank's guns cannot reach them, but where they, in their turn, can do no harm to the advancing British. The Germans are pinned down in their trenches and are an easy prey.

It is now daylight, and Barton can see that on either side the Tanks and infantry are just approaching the wire. In a few minutes the first great difficulty would be over and Hindenburg's line bent, if not actually broken. As soon as the next Tank has crossed the trench, and the infantry are busy mopping up the Bosches, Barton starts off again for the trench ahead—the support-work to the line just captured. Here the Tank meets with a pretty heavy greeting of machine-gun fire, but, keeping his guns going, he pushes straight forward through the wire, and as soon as the tank is in a position to fire along the trench in enfilade the greater part of the German fire ceases, and scraps of paper and other white objects are waved by the Germans in token of surrender, though those who wave take great care not to expose themselves to the view of the Tank.

On looking back to the infantry, Barton sees that they are not making much progress; one Tank appears to be in difficulties in crossing the first trench, though the other is over safely.

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CHAPTER
NINE

THE CALL—Continued

By

Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C.

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CHAPTER NINE

The Call: The Tale of a Tank (continued)

By Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C.

THE infantry seemed to be under fire, and were advancing in very short rushes, and presently stopped altogether. He looked anxiously for the cause of the trouble. All seemed quiet in the trench which his Tank was commanding, and on his left and right the advanced Tanks of other sections were in their positions, also commanding the sections of trench allotted to them. He talked to one of his gunners who had particularly fine sight, but he too was unable to pick up the spot from which the enemy's fire was coming. Then three figures detached themselves from the infantry line and began advancing boldly in rapid rushes. Two appeared to be hit, but the third came right on to within about thirty yards of the Tank. He then took cover and, placing his tin hat on his bayonet pointed it slowly and deliberately at a spot to the right front of the Tank.

This was the signal from the infantry to the Tank that hostile fire was coming from that direction. The scout had succeeded in locating the trouble and had very gallantly come forward in order to be able to indicate the target.

Barton boldly opened the observation flap in front of the Tank, and, using his glasses, at last found his goal. Up near the crest of the hill, away from any trench, were the unmistakable smoke puffs of at least two well-hidden German machine guns.

His orders were to wait at the second trench to let one of the other Tanks come up and drop its fascine into the

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trench, but Barton, having found a place where the trench did not appear to be too broad, decided to risk it. Again the Tank and its driver wrestled with the problem, and again they emerged victorious. On went the Tank, straight as a die, for the enemy's machine guns. The German gunners were well hidden from view, but the gunners in the Tank did their best to smother them with their fire. They were up against a stout-hearted enemy this time, however, who, unlike the Germans in the trench lines, were fighting to the last. Closer and closer drew the Tank, but the Germans went on firing; then the thirty-ton weight of the Tank ground both the machine guns and one of the gunners to the earth. There was no fear of those guns coming to life again.

Through the manhole at the top of the Tank Barton waved the flag signal to the infantry that all was well, and saw them coming on strongly and without taking cover, accompanied now by both their Tanks.

Barton was some distance ahead, and near the crest of the hill; he was not really due to move forward yet, but the temptation to push on and try to get what he called the "priceless targets" that the enemy must be offering over the crest of the hill was too strong to be resisted.

On the Tank went again and climbed over the crest. The view was a disappointing one. Instead of the streams of flying Germans that they had expected, the landscape seemed deserted and almost peaceful, as there was also a comparative lull in the artillery fire on both sides. The Tank was well over the crest of the hill before Barton noticed, only a few hundred yards ahead, four objects at equal distances apart.

"Can it be?" Not only his heart but his brain seems to be beating with furious emphasis. There is no doubt about it now: four German field guns in slight breast-work emplacements at point-blank range. Shall he

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turn back? Can he turn back? Whilst his mind seems to be debating these questions, Barton finds himself ordering his driver to "get into top and open her right out. Straight ahead, full speed!" he adds.

The detachments of the German guns, it appears, were just as surprised as the Tank crew at the sudden encounter.

The Tank is alone and unsupported. It is coming down a forward slope; the light is good and there is no smoke from the German gunners. It is going at its best speed, of some four miles an hour, and its guns are firing hard before the battery takes action. Then, with a crash, the four guns fire in rapid succession. All shots over. The German gunners never expected to fire at so close a target, and fear that by deflecting their guns they may hit the ground just in front of them. The experience of the first round makes shortening the range essential; then one gun fires short, though the others are again "overs." Next round surely they must hit the target.

"Get every ounce out of her: never mind if she rattles to bits!" shouts Barton. Then once more an alternative course presents itself to him. Shall he try to upset the German gun-layers by swerving to the right or left, or shall he keep straight ahead and take the shortest road to the centre of the battery? Boldness has been his lucky star so far, and he decides to keep straight ahead —right to the mouth of the enemy's guns. It is only a matter of a minute now, but how much that minute may mean! Crash! The Tank is hit! Then comes a rending noise, a cloud of harsh-tasting smoke, and each of the crew takes cover and tries to hide his face. Instinct, the blind instinct of nature, the instinct of fear, holds the eight human creatures that form the Tank's crew in its paralysing grip. The leaden hand that causes the bird to watch with terror-struck inactivity the approach of the snake was heavy upon them. Then the stored-up self-control of centuries and the military training of the

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past years come to their rescue, and release them. The paralysis of instinctive fear is removed; the eyes that have shut, open; the hand that has lost for one second the throttle of the engine, finds and opens it wide; the hand that was about to thrust a shell into the breech of the six-pounder gun resumes its work with precision—the Tank's guns and machine guns open fire again.

"Carry on!" shouts Barton. "It's only the top of the cab they've hit. There is no damage done."

The second driver knows that this is not true: a large splinter of metal has hit him just above the heart. He knows it is not true, but he does not say so, for he feels that it would be wrong to distract any of the crew from his job; he just stifles his cries in the sleeve of his tunic and crumples up in silence, and in a few minutes he is dead.

If on the threshold of Valhalla he is greeted as a hero the second driver will be surprised. Such is the humility of heroism.

The German artillerymen pause when the Tank is hit, and for a space they watch; then the Tank, with uncanny power, recovers, and with an indescribable rumble rushes down on them. That short space of brown grass between the two disappears yard by yard. Now it is too late! The Tank is at close quarters and its fire is raking the battery. In it thunders between the guns, then halts. The six-pounders start firing case-shot, wiping out what remains of the German gunners. Their Captain falls forward over the breech of his gun.

"Cease fire!" The artillerymen are soldiers no longer: they have become wounded and suffering beings whose further destruction serves no purpose.

Shortly afterwards the other Tanks and the infantry came over the crest and crowded round the scene of the duel.

There was now little opposition, and the leading troops

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went forward to the bottom of the hill to rest and prepare for the attack on the second objective.

The Tank Company Commander came up.

"Wonderful show!" he said briefly to Barton and his crew. "Take a rest!" he added, and hurried on.

The men lay on the ground, too exhausted with the strain to be able to eat. Barton looked round, feeling that he ought to be busy, and then, slowly, he too sat down to rest. His brain refused to be quiet and jumped back to various things in the past which had at the time made a great impression on him. There was that quiet starlight night when he and his brother had sat outside their dug-out and talked. His brother had been a man of few words, but that night something seemed to be compelling him to talk. How well he remembered his brother saying:

"In life the Great Call comes only once, and when it comes there is every reason why you should not answer it—every reason but one. If you do answer it, whatever the cost may be, you will kindle a glow of content in your heart that nothing can put out. If you do not answer, it does not matter who else forgives you, you will never forgive yourself."

A week later his brother had gone across No Man's Land up to the enemy's wire to try to rescue a wounded man left out from a raid. Several costly attempts had already been made, and orders had been issued that no one else was to go. He went, and was shot to pieces. There was every reason why he should not have gone—every reason but one.

Barton remembered vividly how he had resolved to avenge his brother, and now the chance had come. He glanced up the hill to the remains of the battery. German prisoners were carrying away some of the wounded—but there were many figures lying there that they would not carry away.

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Revenge was not quite so sweet as he had expected.

The Section Commander hurries up to see that all is ready for the assault on the next trenches; there are slight changes to be made in the plans; one of the Tanks of the section has come to grief in the support trench and will probably not come up for some time.

Barton has one man killed in his Tank, and a hole in the front of the Tank; fortunately it is high up and at one side, but it will let in a lot of bullet splash if the Tank comes under heavy fire. However, there is no question of turning back now, and the crew busy themselves tidying up the inside of the Tank and preparing to continue the advance. There is another trench system to be captured in close co-operation with the infantry; then the rôle of Barton's Tank is to advance independently and to hurry on to seize the bridge over the canal before the enemy blows it up.

The assault on the trenches is carried through without much difficulty, though several of the crew get slightly wounded from bullet splash.

Now comes the race for the bridge; the Hindenburg line is breached, and that is a great achievement, but if further progress is not to be delayed it is essential that this bridge shall be captured intact.

The Tank is moving across country now at its best speed, but how slow that best speed seems! The effort is telling upon the crew: the air seems suffocating and the noise of the engines intolerable. At last the Tank approaches the village through which it has to pass to reach the all-important bridge. The Tank Commander easily recognizes the entrance, for there, at the road junction, is the bushy tuft of trees which shelter a roadside shrine. He is already familiar with it from air photographs.

The Tank is now passing the Mairie—again a familiar sight from pictures supplied by refugees from Marcoing,

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who fled to the Allied lines at the beginning of the war. There are still French civilians in the houses, but none are to be seen, as they are taking cover in their cellars, praying that their deliverance may really, at last, be at hand.

The Tank wends its way through the deserted streets, and is getting close to the canal when suddenly, from a side street, a German artillery limber clatters over the *pavé* road. It swings towards the bridge without the driver noticing the Tank.

"Don't shoot!" shouts the Tank Commander.

The gunners are disappointed at losing so good a target, but Barton has been hoping for just such an occurrence. Another limber swings round and makes for the bridge. As long as this transport is using the bridge the German sappers are not likely to blow it up.

The Tank is following the second limber as close as it can, but the Germans are too occupied with getting across the bridge to notice what is behind them. The limber is safely across the bridge, and the German officer in charge of the demolition party steps on to the bridge to see if there is any more transport to cross—and finds himself face to face with the Tank! In a flash he disappears under the bridge to light the fuse that will blow it up. He and his men are now out of reach of the Tank's guns; the Tank gunners have had a shot at him and have missed. Now, before Barton has time to issue orders, two of them are out of the Tank and, revolvers in hand, are darting under the bridge. Half-a-dozen shots in rapid succession—then silence; then a hacking at the connecting wires with the butts of the revolvers, and something is thrown into the water—then silence again.

The bridge is saved!

The Tank is manœuvred into position to command the approach to the bridge and awaits the arrival of the fresh troops who are to carry on the attack.

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Another Tank arrives, then some infantry. News begins to filter through. The attack has been an amazing success, but Flesquières is holding out; however, General Elles has come through safely. The other important bridge at Masnières was blown up just as a Tank was approaching it; the Tank tried to cross and fell in the canal.

The work of Barton and his crew is over. All that remains is to take the Tank back to the rallying-point to report, to fill up with petrol, ammunition, etc., and to rest the crew. The crew are sitting outside the Tank, and as he looks at their pallid and bloodstained faces Barton realizes that it will be no easy task even to get the Tank back. The door of an adjacent house opens, and a middle-aged Frenchwoman comes out, followed by a small girl. She shakes hands with each of the crew, thanking them politely for having been so good as to give themselves the trouble of delivering her from the *sales* Bosches.

Will they come in? No, of course not. *Ces messieurs sont trop fatigués.* She will bring them some refreshment—not all that she could wish, but one will understand that the Prussian pigs have not left much.

Presently she comes back with wine, coffee, bread, and some eggs. Barton refuses to take anything. He realizes that it may be some time before Marcoing becomes a land of sufficiency—much less plenty—and Madame is too generous.

Madame is hurt; how stiff and lacking in understanding some of these English are! The rest of the crew are quite at home, and eat and drink all that Madame brings them, carrying on with her a fluent conversation in a limited vocabulary and some very expressive gestures.

Barton is rather shocked at their thoughtlessness in eating all the Frenchwoman's scanty store, but presently

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he sees that some of the crew are engaging Madame's attention by showing her a "souvenir" German helmet with a bullet hole in it, whilst the Tank Sergeant and a driver are carrying one of the boxes of rations from the Tank into Madame's kitchen.

The engine is started up and the Tank moves off once more, and Barton feels that he has added a lesson in tact to the battle experiences which he has gained during the day.

The return to the rallying-point is a wearisome business, which is rendered yet more trying by the fact that sufficient attention has not been paid to the route and the Tank has come out of its way. The crew would very much like to rest where they are for the night, but Barton feels that he must push on; the Tank may have to fight again on the morrow. He decides, however, to give the crew another short rest while he finds out exactly where he is.

An infantry captain hurries up. He is evidently very exhausted, and at some distance he is followed by a still more exhausted orderly.

"Can you take your Tank up to the top of that ridge and clear up a German strong point that is giving trouble?" he calls to Barton, who shakes his head. "I thought we held the ridge," he continues, "and all our Tanks have gone back, or are out of action. We are getting heavy machine-gun fire from there and I cannot take it on without support, as my men are dog-tired."

Barton explains that he hardly has enough petrol to get to the rallying-point, and that it is very doubtful if it would take them as far as the ridge; and that, in any case, once on top, one Tank alone on the crest of the hill, without any artillery support, would be an easy target for the hostile guns. Besides which, the Tank has been hit, and all the crew are slightly wounded and completely worn out.

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"I am sorry," replies the infantry officer. "If it cannot be done, there is no more to be said. I must hurry back. My unfortunate company was getting heavy casualties when I left."

Through Barton's mind one phrase passed with great distinctness: "When the Call comes, there will be every reason why you should not answer it—every reason but one."

The infantryman is already some way off when Barton calls to him: "We will do it. We shall start at once!"

Arrangements are quickly made. Barton's Tank is to work straight up a fold in the ground to the crest of the hill; on the way he is to pick up four infantrymen to act as Tank gunners; and the rest of the infantry are to follow the Tank as closely as possible, so that it shall not remain exposed on the ridge longer than necessary.

Barton watches the officer start back to his company and then turns to his Tank. He does not see that presently the other goes down before the enemy's fire and rises again to struggle forward, though horribly wounded. Now, he is down again: this time finally; and with him is blotted out the little plan for the infantry co-operation with the Tank attack.

"I want three volunteers to help me to rescue some of the infantry who are in an awkward position," Barton calls to his prostrate crew. "I hate asking any more of you," he adds; "but it is urgent, and there is no one else who can help."

Slowly each of the six men gets up and starts clambering into the Tank once more.

"I can manage with three," he repeated.

But six men are slowly and silently getting on with their respective jobs, and in a few minutes the Tank is on the trek again.

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THE FOUR TANK CORPS V.C.'S

All gained within one year and all awarded posthumously.

Top left—Captain Clement Robertson at Rentel, Ypres Salient, on October 4th, 1917. 1st Battalion.

Bottom left—Captain Richard William Leslie Wain at Marcoing, Cambrai, on November 20th, 1917. 1st Battalion.

Top right—Lieut.-Col. Richard Annesley West near Vaulx-Vraucourt, Amiens, September 2nd, 1918. 6th Battalion, "Stick it, men; show them fight."

Bottom right—Lieut. Cecil Harold Sewell near Frémicourt, Amiens, August 29th, 1918. 3rd Battalion. A Whippet V.C.

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Straight up the hill they go. Barton has sufficient crew and does not wait to pick up any infantrymen ; as for the rest, he is confident that they will follow as closely as possible.

The Germans do not appear to notice the Tank until it is near the crest of the hill and close upon them. Then very heavy fire is opened on the Tank from all sides ; the Tank gunners are in difficulties, and one is almost blinded by bullet splash. Then Barton's forward gun jams. He struggles with it in vain. The situation is now serious ; the Germans are in large numbers and much emboldened by the silence of the Tank. Barton, realizing that something must be done at once, opens the flap and empties his revolver into a party of Germans, who were fully exposed and an easy target. Several of them fall, but the splash from German bullets is coming through the open flap. Someone seems to be pouring boiling water on Barton's eyes. He puts his hands up to them and forces one of the lids open. He sees nothing !

Now the six-pounder guns open fire at last ; well-placed case-shot send a hail of bullets into the Germans with a heavy crash. The Tank has the upper hand once more and drives the enemy off the ridge, but a German field gun sees them retire and at once opens fire.

Three shots hit the Tank with a rending crash ! Inside the Tank all is chaos, but from the smoke and broken metal four of the crew grope their way. Barton is still inside, feeling the bodies of the other two men for any sign of life ; one appears to be dead ; the other is alive, but has his leg pinned under a broken bit of metal. Barton drags at it frantically and, in a moment, two more human beings crawl out of the wreck. Then the Tank catches fire and, amidst the explosions of the ammunition inside, a pillar of smoke and flame mounts to heaven, forming a funeral pyre like that of the heroes of ancient days.

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Again the situation is precarious, but the danger acts like an astringent on Barton's wandering faculties. Still only half-conscious, he begins to act; he feels for his revolver—that, at least, is there—and finds he can now see dimly, and collects his five remaining men. The fittest is posted forward to observe; the rest are told to draw back a little from the Tank, and man some of the many captured German machine guns on the ridge.

"Take a gun each. There are some already loaded and easy to work," Barton orders; "but don't fire until the Bosche comes on to the crest. He may counter-attack before the infantry arrive. Anyway, we've only to hold on for a few minutes," he added.

Then he wondered to himself that he was speaking so quietly and acting so sensibly. "I thought I was dead," he said, half aloud.

Soon another officer and three men from an adjacent company arrive, and Barton explains the situation to them quickly.

The Germans, emboldened by the sight of the burning Tank, come on to the attack, expecting to meet with little opposition; a bunch of them appear on the crest, and as quickly disappear again, decimated by their own machine guns now turned against them. Two more attempts the Germans make, and then give it up. A report is sent back to their Brigade H.Q. to say that the ridge is held in "great strength," and that a further attempt to regain it to-day is useless.

The ridge is won!

Now further parties of infantry come up, and Barton sends his weary crew back to the dressing-station. A Battalion Commander is the next, and he tries to persuade Barton, who now looks very battered and bedraggled, to go back, and sends for a stretcher. The spirit that buoyed up Barton and carried him through the crisis has now almost disappeared; he is wondering whether

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he is conscious or not, and great shapeless patches of blood seem to rise before his eyes. But to all persuasions and orders to go down to the dressing-station he replies:

"I must wait till he comes. I made the plan with him, but I don't know his name. He will he here in a moment. I shall wait."

. . . . . .

Barton still thinks he is waiting for the infantry captain, when he realizes that he is on a stretcher, and the voice of his own Company Commander is asking how he is.

"It was a wonderful day," he is saying; "our casualties were not half as many as the number of the prisoners we've taken—to say nothing of the Germans we've killed. Very few losses in our company," he continues.

"I lost two splendid men and my Tank," said Barton slowly.

"Don't worry about that, sonny. It's the fortune of war. If every Tank could have done as well as yours did yesterday the war would soon be over. I've seen several of your men, and they are going strong; so you have nothing to worry about."

And then the voice faded away.

. . . . . .

"No wonder he could not see: his head was smothered with bandages. Perhaps he was not blind after all? What an endless journey! Would the train never stop?"

Then again a period of emptiness.

. . . . . .

The ward is very still: there are no bad cases tonight. The Night Sister is doing the round; she is frail and tired, but a little smile always hovers round the corners of her mouth, though the tears will sometimes creep into her eyes. All is dark, except for the oil lantern which she carries in her hand.

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The Lady with the Lamp is again passing on her rounds.

She comes to Barton's bed. She looks at the chart at the head of the bed and then at her notes:

"You're doing splendidly. I was rather anxious about you when you were brought in."

Then she bends down to hear what he is whispering. The voice sounds tired, but serene:

"I'm glad I did not miss the Call. I nearly did! There was every reason why we should not go—every reason but one."

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CHAPTER
T E N

STAFF TRIALS

From Material supplied by Brigadier J. C. F. Fuller, C.B.E., D.S.O., Colonel Uzielli, D.S.O., M.C., Captain T. Price, D.S.O., M.C.

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CHAPTER TEN

Staff Trials

BEFORE Colonel Fuller's advent the Staff of the Corps in its swaddling-band days was microscopic, consisting of the Colonel Commandant, Hugh Elles, buttressed by Colonel Le Q. Martel (A.) and Colonel Uzielli (Q.). Their first H.Q. was a Nissen hut in Beaucain, at that time G.H.Q. 3rd Army.

The attitude of the old Army Staff was naturally that of a VI. Form prefect towards the newest and inkiest small boy. They had every reason for being condescending, as Mark I. had, to put it baldly, proved a definite wash-out.

In this freezing atmosphere these soldiers three tried to establish their footing as a pukka unit and to evolve some sort of cohesion out of the chaotic and inharmonious elements gathered promiscuously from the sweepings and leavings of the rest of the B.E.F. Wellington had the same problem with his jail-birds and other unwanted citizens sent to him by a cheese-paring War Office. He made them the backbone of his Peninsular Army. Such also was the evolution of the early Tank Corps ragtag and bobtail. The selected training-ground was the country round Bermicourt Château, and it witnessed some amazing metamorphoses. Men who had not learned even the ABC of mechanics were in a month or two handling tanks with perfect aplomb. Of course there were failures, with the brain-power of rabbits, but these too were employable, as washers and greasers.

One thing, however, was lacking. Elles could not

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double the parts of Commanding Officer and Chief of the Staff. The two demand considerably divergent qualities. He badly needed an unemotional, hard-bitten, clear-headed man, with a mental drive strong enough to override cavillers and slackers alike, and he found that *rara avis* in Colonel J. C. F. Fuller, appointed Chief of the Staff on Boxing Day 1916. A strong proof of Fuller's suitability is that he was given a nickname on the spot, "Boney," which he still bears throughout the Corps.

He always knew his own mind, and manipulated other minds like plasticine. There was a great deal of moulding to be done, for he was up against crass prejudice in high places on the one hand, and also a child-like ignorance of technical warfare amongst many of his own subordinates. The prejudice was eradicated only towards the end of Boney's B.E.F. career, but the ignorance within the Corps was mastered in a surprisingly short time, by willingness to learn and good-humoured ability to teach and not to preach.

The first recruiting for the Corps in France strongly resembled that of David the fugitive in the cave of Adullam.

Fuller says himself: "When I joined the Tank Corps, on 26th December 1916, it was practically a rabble. The Corps had been opened to the army, and every unit which wanted to get rid of undesirable men put forward their names for the Tank Corps."

The proportion of criminals was fortunately much lower in the Tanks than in the cave.

One of the prominent Adullamites was Major Y. He was eminent in two respects: as a souvenir collector, and as a painter of Rubensesque language. In the former capacity he was probably unequalled in the whole army, though a gunner major's assortment of French vehicles and stray horses ran his very close. Major Y.'s souvenirs

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included an aeroplane engine, a Mercedes car and a Nissen hut!

How he came by the aeroplane engine is a war "hush-hush" story; all we can vouch for is that it was safely landed in England during the course of the campaign. The car was acquired in the early days before he became attached to the Tank Corps, and he put it in a garage in Hazebrouck. Towards the end of 1918 he said to a fellow-officer, one Major Thomas Price, D.S.O.:

"You know, Price, this war has been going on for nearly four years now, and there's that car of mine standing in that garage at Hazebrouck. I shall have to indent on the Government for a new set of tyres: the ones on it now will be getting perished."

The Nissen hut is equally authenticated by the same authority:

"One day, when our battalion was resting in Oesthook Wood, the corporals of his company came to Y. and complained that they had no mess like the corporals of other companies.

"'All right, lads, I'll get you a mess,' said Y. That night he took a party of twenty men in a three-ton lorry. He went to H.Q. of a Corps on the Poperinghe road, calmly took down a Nissen hut, packed it on the lorry, brought it back and erected his Corporals' Mess."

The next morning, Price, in amazement, asked him where he had got it.

He told him the story, adding: "And if you're ever doing anything of that sort, Price, and anyone asks you what you're doing, say that you're acting under the orders of the —— Corps!" (That Corps was in Italy, under General Plumer, at the time.)

The picturesqueness of Major Y.'s language would be suitable only for reproduction in the *Rote Fahne*, or *Flag Red*.

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The officers who had to sift these recruits met some odd types. In one case fitters were advertised for, and a Seaforth Highlander turned up. He knew nothing whatever about fitting, or even machinery.

"Why on earth do you call yourself a fitter?"

"Because I am that—a tailor's fitter."

Another Tommy from Yorkshire announced his peace-time calling as a "feeder at nights."

The weary Staff Officer snapped out: "And how does your having taken your nourishment at night qualify you for this Corps? We're not owls!"

The Tyke laughed. "Don't 'e know what a feeder be? It's a man as feeds the wool to the machines, and Knight's is the biggest mill in Huddersfield."

Both were duly moulded into efficient members of the Corps, and both won the D.C.M.

It will be recalled that David likewise created a very fine fighting force out of his "rabble."

How Boney Fuller set about doing this he can best explain:

"I saw at once that the material was good fighting stuff, but that no ordinary system of discipline could be applied to it. The first problem was to weld this mass of disgruntled men into battalions and brigades. This was done mainly by making them comfortable—that is, by opening coffee-bars, wash-houses, canteens, etc. The effect of this was quite extraordinary, for within three months the Corps was as well behaved as any other, and certainly fought much better than most.

"The next problem was the training of the officers. There was, of course, no Training Manual in existence, and nobody had any idea of how to use Tanks correctly. To overcome this difficulty I got General Elles to agree to the issue of a Training Note on tactics, and it was called 'Training Note, No. 2.' It was a longish note, and it dealt with as many points as I could think out,

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and, on the whole, very few of them had to be changed during 1917.

"The next thing we did was to hold an indoor exercise, which lasted very nearly two months. In this exercise we went into the minutest detail, administrative and tactical, starting with a Tank on its tankodrome and ending up with a Tank in action. From this exercise we collected, I should say, several hundred points, which proved of the very greatest use during the remainder of the War. I look upon this exercise, more than upon anything else, as the foundation of the efficiency of the Tank Corps throughout the remainder of the War.

"In April 1917, when the next battle was fought at Arras, the Tank Corps behaved with extreme gallantry. It did not accomplish much, but it showed what it could accomplish when better machines are provided and in greater numbers. The reason for the courage shown by the Tank crews may be traced to three definite causes. The first, the Corps was a new Corps, rather looked down upon by older formations, and consequently placed on its honour to do its utmost to establish its reputation. Secondly, there can be no doubt that if a man is protected by bullet-proof armour his courage rises in direct proportion to the protection provided. Thirdly, and this is rather a curious reason, the noise inside the Tank was so great, and the visibility so poor, that time after time the men inside were not aware of the danger they were running. Before this battle took place I went to great trouble to stimulate the morale of the troops, giving lectures to every single company on *esprit de corps*, morale, discipline and fighting spirit. These lectures undoubtedly helped.

"In the third battle of Ypres the conditions there were so appalling that Tanks most certainly should not have been used. Their use was ordered by G.H.Q., much to the disgust of the Tank Corps officers, who knew

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that the machines could not negotiate swamps created by rain and artillery fire. During the earlier part of this battle numerous cases occurred of Tanks, when once ditched, being abandoned. The position of the Staff was a difficult one. Should the men be definitely ordered to remain with their ditched machines, or should they be allowed to retire? If they remained with their machines, they risked getting killed; and if they retired, their retirement had a detrimental influence on other troops and on the fair name of the Corps. In the circumstances it was decided that the men should not be allowed to abandon their machines, and a special drill was got out to enable them to fight with their machine guns outside their Tanks, should they go out of action. I then thought that our decision was an extremely hard one, but I am perfectly certain that we were right in making it, because nothing is more detrimental to morale than to allow men to fall back without a definite order.

"In the battle of Cambrai the tactics, which were mainly devised by myself, were literally worked out as a ceremonial parade. The preparations were minute, tapelines were laid down for the Tanks to follow, and every movement executed by them, from start to finish, was prearranged. The result was quite astonishing; the whole of the German front line vanished, except on one part, where the Tank Corps tactics had been scrapped. The Tank casualties on the first day were not heavy, and, if a proper reserve of machines had been kept in hand, Cambrai would have been taken on the second day.

"Though the battle of Cambrai established the Corps in the eyes of the public, it in no way convinced G.H.Q., which was extremely conservative, of the value of the machines. In March 1918 the Corps was ordered to distribute its battalions on a frontage of some sixty miles. No more absurd order could have been issued, because, with this frontage, control and supply were practically

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impossible. The result was that, when the Germans attacked, the Tanks could not pull their weight and, though several very gallant actions were fought (which are mentioned in my book, *Tanks in the Great War*), on the whole the Tank operations were a fiasco. Whilst this battle was in progress, G.H.Q. took the opportunity to put forward a suggestion to the War Office to cut down the Tank Corps by a number of battalions. Fortunately the Tank Corps H.Q. put every obstacle in the way of this reduction. The result was that in the summer, when new machines were issued from England, the establishment stood very much as it was before the month of March.

"The battle of Hamel, fought in July, in which not a single man of the Tank Corps was killed, reinstated Tanks in the eyes of G.H.Q. This reinstatement, following on the attempt to reduce the Corps a few months earlier, shows clearly that G.H.Q. had no policy as regards Tanks. After the battle of the 8th August, I went home to the War Office, and consequently saw very little of Tanks in action after this date, though from time to time I visited France to see what was happening. By the end of the War the Tank Corps had established itself so firmly in the minds of Corps and Divisional Commanders that on every possible occasion they shouted for Tanks to support in their attacks. The Tank Corps towards the end of the War was practically disseminated; it had carried out more actual attacks during the last three or four months than any other unit. Many men of the Tank Corps led the van of an attack as many as from ten to fifteen times, and very few infantry did this more than three or four times.

"Unfortunately the Armistice came at a time when the Tank Corps was practically out of action, and immediately after this event its value was rapidly forgotten by the official mind."

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The above summarizes Fuller's special work of turning the Tank Corps' very rough material into a highly finished fighting machine. His part was not spectacular; it was largely a back-aching, heart-breaking grind, coping with problems for which there were no previous data, in addition to the gratuitous difficulties raised by unimaginative superior officers. He had to train men with a civilian outlook to see the real worth of professional soldiering. He had, too, to chew the bitter cud of unmerited criticism when his carefully thought-out plans were discarded for opportunistic adventures, beloved of the happy-go-lucky school. When these ended in deserved disaster, it was easy to throw the blame on those " blasted Tanks."

Fuller has been reproached for being over-enthusiastic about the capabilities of his Tanks. He shares this with most of the pioneers of human progress, many of whom were put in prison, and several also put to death.

Horses will always be used at military gymkhanas, point-to-point races and ceremonial parades, as true members of the army on a peace footing. But no horse-lover, who witnessed the appalling sufferings of the horses serving in the late compaign, can but be grateful to the man who advocates their removal as part of a fighting army. But, apart from any humanitarian considerations, the unit of horse-power is now measured in machines.

Advancing troops in present-day warfare must be able to take immediate cover. An infantryman can at least lie down, and the man in the Tank is already under cover; but a horse does not lie down—except to die! Fuller happened to think a few years ahead of most of his military contemporaries, and prophets are not infrequently " voices crying in the wilderness," where there is no audience.

Though not strictly a Staff episode, the following

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incident seems to fit in here, as illustrating the multiple adaptability of everyone connected with the Tank Corps. It occurred at Grand Servin, near Souchez. The field ambulance attached to the Corps there contained a distinguished surgeon, who had, however, one limitation —a complete inability to make himself understood in French. One night an excited French civilian rushed into the Officers' Mess, where Major Z. was at the time alone. The Frenchman poured out a string of words, amongst which Major Z. thought he caught "*dents.*" "Dentistry case!" he ejaculated, and seizing a case of forceps he rushed off to the civilian's cottage. On his arrival, he found it was a confinement! To his lasting credit, he safely conducted the baby into the world with this unusual outfit! The feat was subsequently known as Major Z.'s "Bouchement"—but not in Harley Street, where he is now practising.

One of the trials of the Tank Corps Staff was the interference of fussy members of infantry staffs, which confirms the old saying that "a man's worst enemies are those of his own household." A certain infantry corps possessed a treasure known as "Thalving Thamuel." He was Salvage Officer for the whole Corps, and had a perfect passion for retrieving unconsidered and inconsiderable trifles. It was the middle—the dismal middle —of the Passchendaele holocaust. Tank Battalions were losing about 70 per cent. of their personnel daily by drowning, gas, or H.E. shells. A Staff Officer of the 2nd Brigade Tank Corps was sadly going over the casualty roll, when the field telephone beside him buzzed sharply.

"Hello!"

"This is Major S——, O.C. Salvage Corps, speaking. Are you the Tank Corps 2nd Brigade H.Q.?"

"Yes. Major Q."

"Good! How many rabbit-skins have you in your unit? Please rush through. Urgent!"

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Major Q., who had just lost two of his best pals and three promising sergeants, reverted to the primitive man and bawled down the instrument:

"Oh, go to hell!"

Being actually present in the same dug-out, the writer can vouch for this being true. It is almost impossible to conceive the mental outlook which could choose such a time for such an "urgent" request.

In addition to difficulties on the B.E.F. Front, Boney Fuller and his assistants had to cope with the *bête noire* of all fighting units—the Home Front.

The "dear old ladies" of Whitehall, entrenched in deep brown leather and guarded from the intrusions of pushful men of action by cocksure and coddling lady secretaries, were never quite sure that they approved of the Tanks. They felt specially dubious when renewals were demanded, more and more extensive as the Corps expanded. Supplies for Tanks seemed to them to be in too constant demand. The Tank Corps was still only a nestling and it seemed to be a nest crammed with ever-open clamorous beaks.

Accordingly, like all office wallahs, they tried to economize by means of pettifogging delays. Of course this method was infinitely more extravagant. For when the supplies did eventually reach their destination they were too late to be of any practical use.

What the Tank Staff longed for was direct supply from the munitions factory to the B.E.F. The route *via* Whitehall was like the track of an obstacle race—every few yards a memo. or an army form, and then a zareba of superfluous civilian clerklets. What saved the situation was the appointment of Winston Churchill as Minister of Munitions. He was the first Minister (when at the Admiralty) to show enough faith in the Tank idea to have it put into experimental practice. Until the end of the war he was the Tanks' most loyal champion,

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A DERELICT TANK

This photograph was taken in Bourlon Wood after the Cambrai Battle, and shows the result of good shooting by enemy field-guns, but it will be noticed that the tank had first obliterated the "strong post."

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a champion who got things done and did not scruple to squash or ignore the Ancient Order of Old Buffers at the War House.

Colonel Uzielli, who as D.A.A. and Q.M.G. was chiefly responsible for obtaining supplies of all kinds, records the fact that since Churchill took over Munitions, he (Uzielli) invariably received everything he asked for direct from the factories concerned. This was undoubtedly due to Churchill's concern for the Tanks. It is impossible to calculate the saving of time this meant, and more—the avoidance of unnecessary worry to all the Tank Corp Staff was an equally valuable asset.

Contrary to war-time conditions, recruiting for the Royal Tanks Corps after the war is often a case of *embarras de richesse*—the cream and not the skimmed milk.

One interesting name was added in 1925 to the Corps, that of Colonel Edward Lawrence—"Prince of Arabia" —but the subsequent publicity was too much for him.

It is natural that much of the best officer material comes from the cavalry, as it did during the time the Tanks were fighting.

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CHAPTER
ELEVEN

THE SET-BACK

Material from "5th Battalion History" and "Royal Tank Corps Book of Honour"

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Set-back

MUCH had been learned in the last year from the adolescence of Tank warfare, and the hard knocks of experience had put the Corps' leadership on a sounder basis. Now H.Q. could judge by past actions, both on favourable and unfavourable terrain, for what contingencies to provide and on what lines to plan operations.

As the 1918 compaign developed, so the Corps' development kept pace. The heavy Tanks moved on, speedier and more landworthy, and the new Whippets (these came into action for the first time on 26th March) evolved practically a new form of offensive. Both in the spring withdrawal and the summer advance the Tanks did sterling work. The testing days of March 1918, when even the sacred Salient seemed likely to pass from us, tried the Tanks—as part of the B.E.F., " with its back to the wall "—and found them wanting neither in courage nor in resource.

It is not too much to claim that by this arm more than by any other the final smashing blow was most effectively delivered. But before the definite break-up of the German will to win, the Tank Corps had to make several rough passages. Further, their Staff was not exactly stimulated by the knowledge that G.H.Q. was still halting between two opinions as to the Tanks being given a permanent place in the general strategic plan.

In the spring, when 21st March arrived, with the débâcle of Gough's army, it found the Corps in the worst possible formation to be of any real use. Its battalions

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were scattered, by order of our High Command, along a frontage of sixty miles. This, of course, made unity of supervision out of the question during the violent German onrush. Battalion Commanders had inevitably to act on their own initiative, as General Orders which were appropriate at the beginning of the offensive became obsolete within twenty-four hours.

The Tank Corps Staff, which was not mentally equipped to do the work of a telescopic camera, could not take a *simultaneous* sixty-mile view of the course of events, but only of certain sectors. As a fair parallel, imagine an infantry division, with its limited Staff, having to defend the border between England and Scotland!

The most remarkable thing was that the entire Corps was not put out of action or captured piecemeal. It did, indeed, suffer very heavy casualties, but not without hitting back stoutly. The Germans advancing triumphantly towards Beuguy, on 22nd March, swollen with perfectly justifiable pride, took a very nasty knock when they came up against the 2nd Battalion of Tanks. The *Drang nach* Paris was at this point stemmed, and by the Tanks alone, for "no infantry were available as supports." It was a fine piece of solo work to hold up a victorious army, especially as the Tanks had nothing to fall back on but hope—and that most forlorn. They did more, however, than merely stop the rot—they thrust in turn and drove back the Bosches to their original line. One fact alone indicates the lost opportunities of March: "Of 370 Tanks available, only 180 came into action."

People at home, reading about the superbly staged German attack of those ides of March, naturally thought of it as a surprise stroke falling on our unsuspecting, almost paralysed men. This is, of course, nonsense! The movement of several hundred thousand troops and thousands of guns must be known to an opponent supplied with wide-awake airmen, such as our own.

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Captured prisoners even gave us the exact zero-hour—dawn, 21st March. The only point in dispute was the precise area where the master-drive would be made. The enemy were further aided by a heavy mist, which blinded both our airmen and gunners during the first stage of the assault, and at the same time isolated the Staffs from their respective units. Still, the enemy's High Command suffered the same disability. They just had to "shoot into the brown." To give the Bosche his deserts, it was his brilliant Staff work, carried out by picked troops, disciplined to utter self-sacrifice (each body a microcosm, self-supporting and moving as an internal-combustion engine), that made that break-through the shrewdest blow our foe had delivered since August 1914.

All those who survived those exhausting days remember them as a perpetual fog. What was happening in front, behind, and on both sides, was equally hazy. Instead of the old massed attacks of cannon-fodder, doomed to fall in swathes before massed field- and machine-gun salvos, the Bosches pierced our front at a hundred distinct points—not hammer-heads, but steel drills. Their man-power was let loose, whilst the effect of tons of high explosive and gas had immobilized our front lines. The storm-troops drove straight ahead, carrying their extra ammunition and rations, and leaving behind islands of our outflanked detachments. These were generally broken into platoons, but in one famous instance an entire battalion of the Munster Fusiliers held together. After wandering here and there in the mist, the Munsters sensed the right direction, and, coolly walking through the smaller bodies of Bosches, headed for home—our reserve lines—which they reached almost intact.

That was the result of the cohesion of some eight hundred infantrymen. A quarter of that number of Tanks, operating on a ten-mile front, would have been

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an incalculable asset in holding up the first rush. The Germans could not have risked leaving such an offensive force in their rear or on their flanks. Each Tank is a mobile battery, and, unlike an ordinary battery, is not chained to one spot, exposed to bracketing gunfire.

Tanks can manœuvre so as to crush or enfilade an advancing enemy, whose guns would be killing their own men if they opened out under such conditions. Again, as actually occurred in the case of the 2nd Tank Battalion, they can counter-attack on their own with fleets of machines and disorganize the concentrations of the enemy's main body, held in leash to exploit any temporary successes of the storm-troops. But, distributed as they were over sixty miles, the Tanks lost the vital asset of combined initiative. Their attacks were sporadic—mosquito-stings, not landslides. They soon ran out of petrol and ammunition, and obviously, on such an extended frontage, supply-dumps were too scattered to meet the immediate demand. Speaking generally, the Tanks were unable—with a few notable exceptions—to pull their proper weight during those pregnant weeks. In a single sector "seventeen Tanks out of a total of thirty were put out of action, and seventy per cent. of their crews passed to the dressing-stations." So heavy were the losses of machines that two entire battalions, the 5th and the 9th, fought on foot, during the March retreat, as machine-gun units.

Though this survey is really outside the scope of a non-controversial work, it is designedly included: for, after the undisputed success of massed Tanks at Cambrai, the previous November, it would be natural to expect them to take some concerted action the following March. It seems only fair to their Staff to emphasize dispersion over such a wide area of the Tanks Corps battalions, which nullified their striking force. Their power of counter-offensive was curtailed, and Staff and crews alike

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were discouraged by avoidable loss of men and material; but, happily, their morale was not lowered, as proved by individual acts of gallantry. A few notes taken from the records of the 5th Battalion will give a fair idea of the performances of the Corps as a whole during this crisis of the war.

A detachment (the 5th) of this Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Pitt, was attached to Carey's force and ordered to hold the line on each side of Villers-Bretonneux, Wachersee, Aboucourt—the position to be held for two days at all costs.

The Commanding Officer was wounded almost at the outset, and Second Lieutenant Whyte took over. "The infantry they were supporting were all category men, and not more than twenty other ranks had any experience of handling a rifle." When the next attack took place they inevitably were beaten back, but Whyte and Captain Bingham, M.C., rallied them and recovered the lost ground. Then the Second Lieutenant took charge of the whole sector. The first German attack was launched at 6 P.M. on the 29th, and they tried again at 10 P.M., but were thrown back by Whyte's Lewis guns.

Next day the Germans came on once more on the right, and were decimated by enfilading fire. In spite of repeated fierce onslaughts on the small Tank detachment, Lieutenant Whyte and his men held on until 10.30 P.M. on the 31st, when he was relieved by the Australians. He received an inadequate M.C. for this dogged defence.

One of the pluckiest members of the detachment was Corporal S. Archbold: "Single-handed he worked a Lewis gun from the 29th to the 30th. He carried the gun and ammunition himself to a new position, firing the gun and loading the magazine without assistance for twenty-four hours, during which period he assisted in breaking two enemy attacks. On the 30th he was wounded in the

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head by a sniper, but continued to work his gun all day, until he was ordered by his officer to the dressing-station. This devotion to duty gained for him the D.C.M."

The initiative of the Tank Corps' N.C.O.'s was a very gratifying result of their special training. Their gallantry was inbred.

The 8th Detachment is proud of the action of Second Lieutenant T. van Zeller on the 23rd: "His Tank was covering the withdrawal of our infantry across the Somme, moving from Carligny to Brie, on the west side of the river. He inflicted severe casualties on the enemy and was under heavy and continuous shell-fire. On arriving at Brie, late in the afternoon of the 23rd, he found that the bridge was about to be blown up and that his Tank could not cross. He accordingly destroyed his Tank, and then directed his crew in assisting to carry wounded across the bridge. Finding two men seriously wounded had been left behind, he decided, with three of his crew, to make an effort to rescue them at the last moment. When half-way across, the bridge was blown up in front and behind them. Lieutenant van Zeller succeeded in getting the whole party across the debris under heavy shell-fire, and finally brought them back behind our lines on the west side of the river." (The three members of his crew who assisted in the last plucky effort—Privates S. C. Gosling, G. J. Barrett and R. Curtis —each received the M.M., and van Zeller the M.C.)

Their names are given in case any relatives, or even those seriously wounded men themselves, should happen to read this cameo of war's finer side.

The Battalion was later reunited in the Ypres Salient, and, after short intensive training with Hotchkiss guns, went into action near Meteren, in front of Bailleul. The Germans had pushed forward rapidly, capturing the high ground between Neuve Eglise and Bailleul, which we had held since 1915. Our troops were in continuous

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danger of being outflanked, and the 5th Tank Battalion did some fine work in preventing a local Sedan.

Second Lieutenant F. Dawson, assisted by Second Lieutenant P. B. Bayliss, showed great coolness at a time when youthful heads might pardonably have been lost. He placed four of his guns in the open, covered the exposed flank, and held up the attack. During the night of the 17th to 18th April he dug a trench connecting these isolated posts with our original line, and posted his guns in this new trench. The enemy posted two guns behind a hedge about two hundred yards in front of the position. These two guns, however, were knocked out before firing a shot, and when the enemy tried to assemble behind the same hedge for an attack they were driven back with heavy casualties. This well thought-out defence, performed throughout under frontal and enfilading fire, saved the company from an attack which would have endangered the entire position. Second Lieutenant Dawson received the M.C. Privates J. Thompson and J. W. Smith each earned the M.M. in this defence. For two days they kept their guns in action, under hostile fire, with extreme coolness and accuracy, accounting for at least two German machine guns and breaking up the impending attack. Private G. Allen also showed conspicuous gallantry on 16th and 17th April. By his accurate shooting he inflicted heavy losses on two hostile attacks, and put an enemy machine gun out of action after all the other members of the crew were casualties. He continued single-handed until his gun was destroyed by shell-fire. He also received the M.M.

"Two days' continuous firing," and "single-handed!" These unemotional army descriptions rather err on the side of restraint. One has to fill in the outlines of what it meant in the way of nerve and endurance. When you have your friends round you, you have the collected

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courage of the unit, but when you are the unit, then is the time that the steel of a man's spirit is tempered.

After the fight was over, and when, owing to the pressure of the British-French-Belgian-American forces on sectors north and south of this part of the line, the Germans had withdrawn, a certain shell-scarred ridge had its own *pièce de théâtre*. We had amongst our senior officers one of whose Corps it was said: "The Nth Corps—they don't fight, they write . . . bumph!" This, of course, wasn't true; they fought well whenever called upon, but they did certainly rather wallow in wordy reports. The G.O.C. the Corps had a ready pen, and was uncommonly fond of improving the occasion. To his subordinates he delegated the job of seeking and finding the occasions. His unhappy Brigadiers spent no small part of each morning keeping abreast of the "bumph" budget. One of his foibles was sanitation. It used to be said that "an army fights on its stomach." General P. was more fundamental. He substituted drains for digestions. He had a platoon of bright young experts, who scoured the countryside nosing out noxious aromas and tracking them to their polluted source. Then followed a lengthy screed to the Commanding Officer responsible for that particular area, pointing out the dreadful dangers of an unlawful smell on the health of his Command.

A company of Tanks were resting in the low ground behind the before-mentioned ridge. It was actually the Messines Ridge. Suddenly a message came through that the Corps Commander would honour them with a visit of inspection within an hour. There was a great burning of rubbish, and much sweeping and polishing. The crews had managed to remove one coating, at least, of grease from their hands before the Corps Commander drove up. He walked all round the Tanks, where the odour of petrol and oil more or less overpowered all less-

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desirable effluences: and then, ranging wider, started up the ridge. About one hundred yards from the most advanced Tank he halted on the lip of an old shell-hole, and, looking within, stood as Lot's wife—stiff as a pillar of salt. His Staff grouped themselves round him in order of seniority and followed his fixed gaze with horror on their mobile faces. The Tank Corps officers, politely escorting their exalted guest, gathered round, bewildered at the unwonted fall in the social temperature.

At last the General regained his power of speech. With a dramatic gesture he flung out his arm, with the fore-finger pointing downward, and thundered:

"Colonel T., what is this?"

The Colonel—who before joining the Tanks had been in a Service Battalion of the Black Watch and feared neither man nor devil—deliberately fixed a monocle in his remaining sound eye and looked along the line of the General's arm.

In the very centre of the crater lay the body of a very small but most pungent cat. It had been there, most evidently, for weeks—perhaps months—during the cold spell, and now that balmy May was opening out, the spring had had its way with the defunct pussy.

"Looks and smells like a cat, sir. Might almost be a civet—what?"

"This is no matter for jest, Colonel. That nuisance so close to your men is a menace, and must be removed at once."

The Colonel looked up the long ridge, over which, only a year before, he had carried his battalion, and which still bore the crop of thousands of 9·2 craters. He, in common with hundreds of others attached to the Corps, was fed to the teeth with the unending stream of petty orders and regulations which made the resting-time worse than being badly crumped, and his civilian soul burst for once its bonds.

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"Well, sir, if I am expected to go round the odd 10,000 shell-holes on Messines Ridge looking for dead cats, I'd better go home."

The General it was who went home instead, and, being human, once under cover in his car, allowed himself a very human chuckle.

This was the second time Colonel T. had met and routed officialdom. The other occasion was shortly after the battle of Loos. His battalion had had a bad gruelling, and their discipline was distinctly ragged. A new Divisional Commander, very stiffly starched, had marked them for a taping. He believed in personal observation, and, like the Caliph of Bagdad, did his observing disguised as one of the people.

Wearing a Tommy's uniform, General H. posted himself one night at a cross-road to note the march discipline of the Nth Black Watch. It was a particularly unpleasant night, and his tremendous sense of duty as well as his temper were almost all out before an hour had passed, and the battalion had not yet arrived—hopelessly behind scheduled time.

"Curse their dilatoriness! I'll make that Colonel T. understand what a proper relief means when we next meet!"

Thus the General muttered, as the rain trickled between his tunic and his skin.

At last the chug-chug of feet splashing along the muddy by-road warned him of the battalion's propinquity.

On they came in the darkness: slipping, swaying, and all over the road, "like a herd of their own Highland cattle, damn them!"

A Véry light irradiated the night and made even the men's faces visible, including that of the lonely figure by the wayside.

"By gosh, Sandy, it's old Barebones, spying as usual!" whispered one Highlander to another.

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Sandy grunted. He was the flank man, and, in passing, would almost have to brush against his Divisional Commander. He judged the right moment whilst the Véry light flickered out. Up went his left arm, grasping the muzzle of his rifle, whilst his right guided his aim. The heavy butt caught the over-zealous General in the lower chest and bowled him over into a most ill-favoured shell-hole, providentially placed in his immediate rear.

The Battalion tramped on stolidly, but, by some mysterious crowd-sense, the news ran along the ranks up to the head of the column that Lance-Corporal Sandy MacNab had squared at least one of the accounts the Nth had against the Division.

Next day, in Regimental Orders, appeared amongst promotions in the field that of 78826 Lance-Corporal MacNab, to be full Sergeant, for "extreme presence of mind in an emergency."

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CHAPTER
TWELVE

THE TIDE TURNS: VILLERS-BRETONNEUX

Material from the "Official History of the Royal Tank Corps" and the "Book of Honour"

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CHAPTER TWELVE

The Tide Turns: Villers-Bretonneux

BEFORE April was out the Germans had fought themselves to a standstill. As we had learnt bitterly on the Somme in 1916, a continuous offensive usually weakens the thrusters more than the parriers. When they began to tire, our defensive passed to the counter-offensive, and on 24th April the Tanks started the ball rolling again in the direction of Germany at Villers-Bretonneux, from which place it continued to roll on to the bridge-head of the Rhine.

To the members of the Corps, Villers-Bretonneux is nearly as interesting a memory as Cambrai—for there was fought the first duel between Tank and Tank. The enemy had broken through at Cachy with the support of three male Tanks (which were both larger and heavier than ours). Opposed to them were three British Tanks of the 1st Brigade—two being female, armed only with machine guns. At the first clash both female Tanks were knocked out by direct hits from the German Tanks' guns. That left one British male to face three-to-one odds. Discretion was to be expected but the valorous part was chosen, and Lieutenant Mitchell took on all three at once.

Manœuvring cleverly, he got in three hits forthwith with his six-pounder, which put one of the enemy out of step permanently—its experience of the Great War ending in an adjacent sandpit into which it made a conclusive nose-dive.

Mitchell then swung round and went for the other two, spitting shells from port and starboard guns. The

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Germans in this case did not uphold the good name of their machine gunners, but turned tail literally in a *sauve-qui-peut* flight. By a piece of bad luck Mitchell's Tank itself was disabled shortly afterwards by an enemy field gun.

This spirited engagement took place at breakfast-time, and only half-an-hour later the curtain went up on the second episode, in which the Whippets starred.

These were seven Whippets belonging to the 3rd Battalion, and their orders were to attack a ridge north of Cachy, between Villers-Bretonneux and Hangard Wood. It was a tough job, as the Germans were not only morally on top, because of their successful break-through, but were actually posted as well on much higher ground. This ridge was sown with "dragon's teeth" (otherwise machine-gun nests), concealed in pits. On the rear slope two enemy battalions were forming for a further attack. The Whippets took the ridge in their stride, after first smoking out every single nest, and then breasted the top. What followed provides a most convincing argument for Colonel Fuller's gospel of a mechanized army—7 Whippets, with their crews totalling 21 men, engaged two entire battalions of well over 1000 men and routed them utterly. All resistance was swamped, though the enemy were of good fighting material; 400 Germans were killed or wounded, and our casualties were only 5 men wounded.

It was a case of rapidly moving, armour-plated Hotchkiss guns, invulnerable to bombs and rifle-fire, overwhelming the defences of an out-of-date warfare.

What would have happened if, instead of 7 Whippets, 200 Hussars or Lancers had tried to carry the ridge? We would prabably have had 400 casualties, men and horses, and the German infantry would have continued their advance later with added *élan*. The speed of the Whippets was a new factor. Leaving their base at

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10.30 A.M., distant three and a half miles, they fought an action covering ten miles of ground and were back at their base by 2.30 P.M.

Supply Tanks generally led rather uneventful lives, but one of them, "Kingfisher," lived up to its lively name. It was a Mark V. of the 10th Battalion and was operating in the Courcelette area. "Kingfisher" set out on his daily delivery round, complete with a crew of six. His strict duty was to victual other Tanks with petrol, ammunition, etc., and keep out of harm's way, if possible; but, like other adventurous birds, he allowed the wine of excitement to go to his head. In fact, he ran himself right on to the sights of a German anti-Tank battery. The enemy gunners caught "Kingfisher" on the flank with their broadside and blew one track clean off, disabling five of the crew. The survivor, Private Christmas W., seems to have become for the time mentally intoxicated. His Tank could now only travel in a circle, and his next move obviously was to abandon ship. Instead, he opened the throttle wider and stayed in. Perhaps in civil life he had been a member of the Metropolitan Railway staff: for the succeeding half-hour he drove on the "Inner Circle" over everything in his way —trenches, houses, batteries, shell-holes and Germans. A providential mist had descended, so he was a difficult target. He enjoyed himself hugely. It was a fearsome spectacle. The maimed Tank, twisted out of shape, charging round and round, scattering or crushing everything it met, only needed a little wild music to complete the resemblance to a Valkyrie on a merry-go-round.

A kind of vertigo possessed Private Christmas—such as one sometimes feels on the ordinary sort of roundabout. He could not stop (not that he in the least wished to do so), but, like the Wandering Jew, he had to go on dree ing his circular weird. At last the Germans managed to train another gun on "Kingfisher," shot through his

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other wing and captured the Private C.O. He, however, was too untamable for captivity. Two of our Whippets loomed suddenly out of the mist, bore down on the enemy crowding round the disabled "Kingfisher," made them all prisoners and released the knight-errant. He, by immediate award, was created Private Christmas W., M.M.

The following Sunday both sides were so exhausted that there was an unofficial Day of Rest, except for the gunners. One of the Tank Company padres, who had two days previously defied the Army Chaplains Department's unwritten code in taking a personal part in a Tank charge, arranged a service out of range of field guns though well within call of the heavies. He was not really a fire-eater but a very mild-mannered pink-faced parson, who had deserted Mothers' Meetings for Mars, and now openly preferred the latter.

The Company C.O., an old Regular, happened to be one of those religious fanatics who believe that their own personal security here and hereafter is occupying the continuous exclusive attention of the Deity. These freaks are not as uncommon in the Regular forces as might be supposed.

The village where the Parade Service was to be held was being badly shelled that morning by Bosche 9·45 guns, which were making bad shooting at some of our captive balloons. The Padre telephoned from his mess to the C.O.:

"What about putting off the parade for an hour?"

The C.O. replied:

"King's Regulations prescribe that a Parade Service shall be held at least once a Sunday and do not contain any saving clause about shells." He added: "If you are afraid to come along, I'll take the parade myself."

That was too much for even the mildest ex-curate to

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swallow. Also, he knew the Major's style of oratory, and felt for the men.

Accordingly, he and his batman started out with the usual knapsack stuffed with hymn-books, and the batman also carried the portable organ, or "squeeze box."

The village street was pregnantly empty, and the two, knowing what that meant from past experience, felt a chilling emptiness rising from the pit of the stomach into the back of the throat: in two words, "wind up!" Suddenly there was a roar, rising into a tearing shriek, and a great 9·45 shell sailed over and burst high overhead just beyond them. Then followed that almost indescribable sound, compounded of calico being torn and a lost soul in the act of dissolution. This indicated that the shell's 4 ft. long extra nose-cap was descending to earth intact. It descended on another spot than that where they were standing, otherwise this chapter would not be completed. The batman looked at his Padre, and the other looked for a "better 'ole." Then the words of the Major came back to him, with their horrid implication, and they went forward.

A few more bursts followed, and once the batman, Private Steele, late of the Gloucestershire Regiment, said in a conversational way:

"I believe, sir, something has just hit me on my webbing-belt."

He stooped down and picked up a small jagged piece of warm steel.

They finished their journey at a smart trot and found the congregation assembled under the lee of a wall. This was merely for appearances, being about as sound a bulwark against heavy stuff as blotting-paper. The C.O. had been called away to speak to his Brigadier on the phone and a subaltern handed over the parade to the Padre.

The first hymn was half-way through when the Bosche started with another kind of gun—a quick-firer, nick-

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named by our men "Brierley." The first salvo went over their heads and burst on their side of the wall. The congregation promptly moved itself to the near side and began again.

Then the uncircumcised Hun started bracketing, which is really wearing to the nerves—one over, one short, and the third burst usually gets you. This was the moment chosen by the C.O. to return to his unit. The whistle of No. 8 and his arrival synchronized. The entire parade fell flat on their faces in the clay, Padre in cassock and surplice, and (to confess the sad truth) the over-religious C.O. also buried his sanctimonious nose in sticky Mother Earth.

If it had not been Divine Service, and that he was in command of the parade, the Padre would have cheered. Whether a Bosche 'plane had spotted them, or whether it was just Old Nick playing a jest on the unco guid, is uncertain, but for the next ten minutes it rained shell splinters. At every explosion the troops flattened themselves, and then, springing up, ran a few yards before the next salvo came down. There was a copse handy, and eventually they made it, mostly by crawling. Then each man took a tree, and dodging from one to another gradually worked himself to more or less safety. The parade was concluded in a barn. It is pleasant to be able to add that the C.O. was much more human ever afterwards.

This same adventurous Padre was the victim of another contretemps whilst on his Sunday rounds. A brigade of Tanks frequently extends over a wide area, and a car is not always available. The M.O., who was the Mess President, had acquired for ten francs a French four-wheeler with a body rather like a hearse. It was used for mess stores and was drawn by a "hairy" (heavy transport horse). The harness was thrown in for the purchase price, and was of rotten leather and frayed

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rope. This was the Padre's Sabbath jaunting-car. He and Private Steele piled up their service paraphernalia inside and themselves took the box-seat. It was a lovely springlike day and the first few miles were delightful. They then had to pass through a small town in the back areas district, still inhabited. Robert, the horse, stepped out bravely, and the hearse bumped over the uneven *pavé*. Whizz! Plonk! came an aeroplane bomb, and the town withdrew to the cellars. Robert pricked up one ear and heaved up his sturdy quarters. Then three bombs came within the next minute and he decided that the country was better than the town, and made straight for it. The buggy swung and bounced from cobble to cobble: the human freight hung on with hands and feet. To guide or control Robert was useless. One wrench of his powerful teeth, embedded in the bit, would have disintegrated the reins. Occasionally the face of some bolder Frenchman appeared at a window, fascinated by the strange object hurtling through his native place. No more bombs followed, but Robert took no chances. The wheels were wobbly, and became wobblier, but still held. Now they were out of the town and descending a hill, which caused both the Padre and batman to regret certain episodes in their past lives. But the age of miracles is still with us, for they sped down the steep gradient intact and began the consequent climb. How the passengers blessed Nature's love of regularity, that where there is a stiff drop there is invariably an equally stiff rise to meet it. That reduced Robert's horse-power, and he soon changed gears from a gallop to a canter and then a sudden stop. This being unexpected, the Padre and the batman took the floor on either side of Robert, accompanied by an avalanche of service-books and a disembodied organ.

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CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

HAMEL-MOREUIL

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Hamel-Moreuil

BEAUMONT-HAMEL (a name of gloomy memories) was the next large-scale show, and introduced the Mark V. machine in numbers for the first time to the Bosches. It was a most unwelcome presentation. For Mark V. was a speedy, heavily armoured and armed Tank, firing two six-pounders and three Hotchkiss guns. It was easy to manœuvre, and when equipped with cribs could negotiate even canals where the bridges had been blown up.

In the Hamel attack on 4th July the Australians had the principal share, and between them and the Tanks the combination was as perfect as that of a Chubb safe. The barrage came down, lifted, crept forward: and the allied arms—infantry, Tanks—shadowing it, advanced, reached their objectives to the minute, and pressed on. Even the Tanks' most formidable enemy, the field gun, was that day out of the running. These greatly improved machines were too mobile, too elusive; the gunners had not time to register and get the range before the Mark V.'s were on the top of them, and guns and gunners were crushed out of existence.

It would be an instructive addition to Tank history to have the first impressions of survivors amongst their opponents concerning our latest machine. There is something fundamentally awful in moving gun-platforms where you cannot see the men working the guns. Further, the Mark V. had both the destructive power of a steam-roller and the tacking flexibility of a racing motor-boat. Bullets rebounded off its squat body, or flattened

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themselves into splash. The worst, however, as already mentioned, must have been the absence of a visible human agency. The crew were unseen: Invicta seemed to deal death of its own volition. Moving pictures flashed across the retina of the men inside the Tanks—of kneeling figures seen for a fraction as the Tank swept over them, and seen no more. Whole companies were obliterated. It was a repetition of the sensations of antediluvian man facing the huge scaly lizards of his day. What could he do against them with his flint axe or puny arrows? His weapons were quite as deadly to those armoured reptiles as bayonet, rifle or bomb to the Mark V.

On one sector, at Hamel, 60 Mark V.'s of the 5th Brigade destroyed over 200 machine guns and their crews, having only 5 Tanks in all damaged and 18 men wounded. That destruction saved thousands of Australian lives. The Bosche High Command had for over a year underrated the offensive value of our Tanks, but after Hamel they changed their mind, becoming almost panicky. They did improvise an anti-Tank rifle, but it was so clumsy, and had such a kick, that their men would not use it as a general rule. It was too late to meet the peril in the natural way, by opposing fleets of their own Tanks. For they lacked trained crews, and these could not be equipped in time to meet the present urgent need.

Consequently, from Hamel onward until the Armistice, the British Tanks became increasingly more aggressive and destructive, and the terror of them lowered more rapidly the morale of the German forces than any other factor. War is always frightful, but in mechanical warfare there is an added terror arising from the inherent insensibility of the machine. Another partnership which endured until the end of the war was first cemented at Hamel—between the Whippets and aeroplanes. This was to be most fruitful, and the two arms became as

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Orestes and Pylades. This first experiment was so successful that from that day a special squadron was allotted to the Tank Corps.

Hamel was just as methodically and exhaustively planned beforehand as was Cambrai, and the flawless precision with which the Tank Staff's plans were carried out by all their units so impressed G.H.Q., and confounded the critics, that at long last the Tanks sloughed off the Ugly Duckling complex and became Everybody's Darling. No small share in securing this belated recognition is due to the G.O.C. 5th Tank Brigade, General Courage. For weeks before, he worked daily in bringing about a mutual understanding between his men and the Australian infantry, with whom they were to make the joint attack. It was a case of sheer personality, plus a shrewd knowledge of human nature, achieving its purpose. For the Australians were inclined to mistrust the Tanks, owing to an unhappy earlier experience. This lukewarmness, which would have been fatal to a successful co-operation, was changed even before the fight began into a cheerful glow of confidence. The two arms went over at zero-hour as though it were a Field Day, and each successive phase adhered strictly to schedule. The Staff had only to tick off their operation orders, paragraph by paragraph, as the Tank chessmen moved across the board. It follows naturally that the tactics worked out at Hamel became a model for all subsequent actions. In one vital respect, to which reference has already been made, Hamel was the most satisfactory Tank action of the war.

This was that Tanks obliterated over 200 enemy machine guns at a cost of 18 of their own men wounded.

Many gallant deeds passed unnoticed where all were up to standard. Second Lieutenant F. W. Prentice, of the 8th Battalion, had completed his proper day's work by leading the infantry to their final objective. Then he

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began to do overtime. Patrolling his Tank up and down the front of his Australian flock he settled down to annihilate hostile machine-gun groups. Having mopped them all up, he next proceeded to run over and crush one field gun and capture another which had dared to fire at his infantry. Our protective barrage was still kept going, but did not deter the extremely courageous German machine gunners from firing though it. This incensed Prentice, as displaying contempt for our own gunners, so he promptly drove his Tank through the same barrage, in order to teach these presumptuous machine guns not to harass our infantry. He smote them hip and thigh, and incidentally went berserk, leaping out of his Tank with one of his gunners and man-handling the now chastened Bosches. He even dived into their trenches: on one occasion pulling out a terrified infantryman by his gas-mask. This unorthodox advance was unfortunately checked by a steel-cored bullet from one of the rare anti-Tank rifles in actual use, which damaged the Tank's machinery and forced the fire-eating Second Lieutenant to retire. He was given an M.C.

Another young Second Lieutenant, A. H. Baker, M.C., did good work at Hamel. He belonged to No. 1 Field Company, Tank Corps, which was a Salvage unit. Baker started his day by going over the top with the assaulting waves of infantry as far as Hamel village. This was at 8.10 A.M. on the 4th of July. Arrived there, he looked round for a job, and found it at once in a Tank with one track completely ripped off. He put that right again by four hours' intensive toil. Proceeding through the village, Baker came across a second Tank disabled by a direct hit, and with his men's assistance he got that once more into fighting trim. This subaltern worked continuously from before dawn on the 4th until nearly midnight of the 6th, with only six hours' sleep, and

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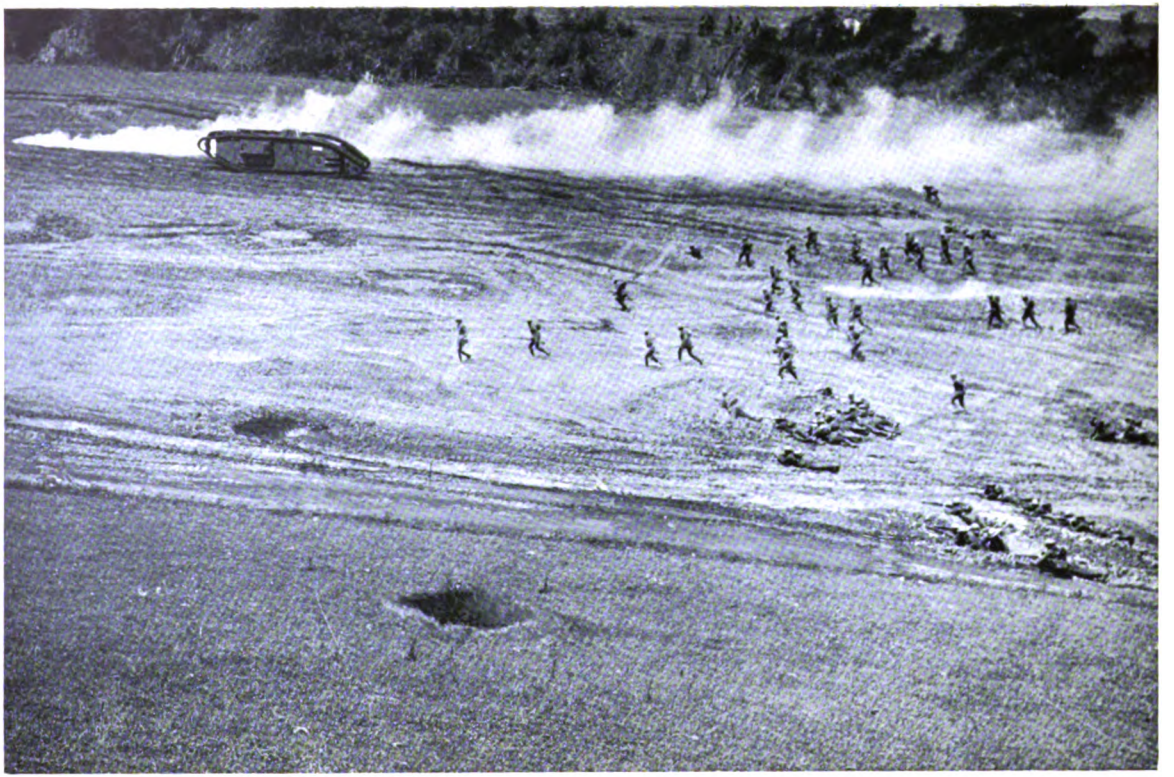

A SMOKE SCREEN

Infantry advancing at Sautrecourt covered by a tank which is providing a barrage both of bullets and smoke.

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working in anything but a salubrious environment. During almost this whole period Hamel was being heavily crumped, and saturated as well with gas. Everything had consequently to be done in gas-masks. Six of his men became casualties, but Baker came through untouched, to get a bar to his M.C.

Another resourceful subaltern was Second Lieutenant T. Dower. After overrunning a nest of machine guns, and so clearing the way for the infantry, he had the bad luck to get his Tank ditched under full observation of the enemy and within easy rifle and machine-gun range. Both arms opened up freely, but Dower, with uncanny coolness, started to dig his Tank out, and eventually got it clear and away without a single casualty to his crew. This seems to have stimulated him, for he promptly took fifty of the enemy prisoners. That was, of course, a useful haul, but the salving of his Tank was more—it was a fine feat of arms. It required the rarer kind of courage: not the molten variety, but chilled steel, where the individual has a quite dispassionate view of what is likely to happen to him and carries on all the same.

With the turning of the tide eastwards the intensive forward movement of our troops must inevitably be expensive, though the casualties, as compared with earlier actions over the same ground, were much lower. Many of our men could not help thinking back nearly two years. . . . It was a wild night in 1916, with fierce gusts of wind, raw and biting for the season, and freshets of whipping rain. The countryside, trampled pasture or uncropped corn, ruined and deserted farms, decapitated woods, roads once poplar-lined now only marked by twisted stumps, and every few miles a shattered row of cottages—all this for miles and miles was the Somme on 15th September 1916, the Tanks' birthday.

Man has scarified the landscape with jagged ditches,

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whose bleak parapets peer at you in the dark — like snakes of chalk.

One can always feel and smell the desolation, if not see it. One's feet are treading tortured ground, where Earth has been broken, ground to powder as her children were first broken above her, and now lie beneath her torn breast. She has suffered, too: her face is marred, her beauty all withered.

Suddenly an arm lifts night's pall with a swift gesture, rips it aside and discloses the bareness of the land. The light is merciless: no kindly half-tones or gradations, but sheer stark brightness. This reveals a chaos of sprawling duck-boards, battered limbers, wisps of equipment, empty petrol-tins, dumps of discarded bully, acres of rusted barbed wire, and, as a background, the wraiths of deserted trenches.

The white world spreads, and long shafts of light stream past across the plain until they reach at length a hallowed corner. There the light ceases to be an invader and becomes a symbol. "They cannot sit in darkness . . . they have seen a great light."

In all that dismal rubbish-heap here alone is one decent and orderly plot, sown with the pluck and patient endurance of our countrymen who have given the full service.

Then, as swiftly as it came, the light flickers and vanishes, and folds of blackness wrap themselves round everything once more. The light has gone, but something has been rekindled by its symbolizing touch. A fresh spirit, a spirit of renewal, descends on the jaded boys tramping slowly but stoutly back to their grim job. They have seen the Véry lights outlining the graves of their pals, and how can they fail to play the man as did those others of their blood?

Moreuil, 23rd July.—The month of July saw the final petering out of the immense effort made by the enemy

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to secure a one-innings decision. As he weakened, the Allies became more aggressive. They were not quite ready to launch their own general offensive, but meanwhile they delivered some shrewd local thrusts. The latest of these was at Moreuil, by the French 3rd Division.

A request was made to Haig for the assistance of a battalion of our Tanks, and the 9th Battalion was chosen. This belonged to the 5th Brigade, and once more General Courage left nothing to chance. A week before the action he got into touch with the French Divisional Commander, and together they worked out down to the smallest detail the actual scheme of operations.

Consequently, when our thirty-six Tanks went over, the French infantry knew exactly what they were out to do and, to use an expressive modernism, they "clicked." It was a very neat little victory: no might-have-beens, but all according to plan.

The delight of our Allies at the unexpected smoothness of co-operation was shown in the very generous list of honours and mentions bestowed on the 9th Battalion. The C.O., Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Kennedy Woods, came in for a panegyric. His leadership of the Battalion was greatly admired:

" . . . He had made his Battalion a *corps d'élite*, of which the fighting *élan*, the *esprit de corps* and the finished technical efficiency roused our unanimous admiration. His Battalion lent a powerful and unstinted support to the 3rd French Division in the battle of 23rd July 1918."

The entire Battalion was cited in French Army Orders, from which we extract a few lines:

. . . They have given the Division the finest example of bravery, energy of comradeship in action, and of war

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training carried to the highest degree of perfection. The officers and men who fell gave an example of how a British soldier can die for his King and Country. . . . La Grenadière [the war name of the 3rd French Division] hereby addresses to its British comrades the devoted expression of its gratitude and admiration.

(*Signed*) NAYAL DE BOURGON,
General Commanding
3ième Infanterie Division.

Further, the 9th Battalion colours were decorated with the Croix de Guerre, and the badge of "La Grenadière" Division—a grenade enclosed in a belt with the motto "*Qui s'y forte s'y brûle*"—was conferred upon all ranks of the Battalion. This badge is for all time to be worn on the left sleeve of every member of the 9th Battalion.

At the last Cambrai Dinner, held in London on 20th November 1928, the actual document issued from the French War Office confirming this signal honour was with due ceremony handed over to the O.C. the 3rd Battalion [1] by Major-General Sir John Capper, K.C.B., Colonel Commandant of the Royal Tank Corps.

The most gallant exploit on record during this engagement is perhaps that of Captain John Dalton. It merited more than an M.C. Near Hurpon Wood he located an enemy field battery, obtaining a direct hit on one gun with his six-pounder. He subsequently silenced the whole battery, driving off the gunners with his machine guns, and then manœuvred his Tank into position to tow back to our lines the captured guns. At that instant his Tank had a direct hit, followed immediately by a second. After evacuating his crew, Dalton made a gallant effort to get back to the Tank alone, under intense machine-gun fire and in direct view of the enemy, in

[1] The 3rd Battalion is the direct descendant of the old 9th.

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order to blow it up and prevent them capturing it and so learning more about Mark V.'s mechanism.

Unfortunately, he was severely wounded in the thigh, but even then, refusing assistance, he succeeded in crawling back to the French lines, and sent in a clear report of the situation before leaving the aid-post.

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AMIENS—STRAIGHT FROM THE SHOULDER

Material from the "Official History of the Royal Tank Corps" and the "Book of Honour"

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Amiens—Straight from the Shoulder

VILLERS-BRETONNEUX (24th April) and Hamel (4th July) had been trial rounds. They demonstrated unmistakably that the enemy's morale was beginning to wear thin. We put out our feelers, stung him badly at comparatively small cost to ourselves, and gained much precious information as to what tactics paid best. Now the time was ripe for opening the Grand Offensive, which was in the main Haig's work, as the Generalissimo himself has stated. Foch dissected carefully the factors involving the failure of the German Spring Offensive—a failure nothing short of colossal, proportionate to their prodigal expenditure of men and material. Learning from the enemy's blunders, he discerned the only possible scheme of forward operations—a recurring series of short offensives. The boxing-ring gives us a fair analogy. There the pugilist generally defeats his opponent by repeated hammerings, whose cumulative weakening effect intensifies the delivery of the final knock-out. The Bosches went all out for a K.O. in the first round. They failed, and Foch, following the tactics of Fabius Cunctatus, began slicing off one piece after another of the enemy's front, pausing only long enough to let his troops get their second wind. From now on to the end his blows fell in arithmetical progression, now on one sector now on another, while the units employed were, whenever possible, of unimpaired vigour.

When an army, or group of armies, had fought an action it automatically passed to the Reserve, and

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adequately rested troops carried through the next phase. The enemy was never given time to pull himself together before the next wave swamped him. Above all, Foch did not repeat the German blunder of outdistancing his supplies nor of leaving his lines of communication in the air.

Rawlinson's 4th Army was the spear-head of the attack on our Front, supported by 430 Tanks, including Whippets and the 17th Armoured Car Battalion. This was the largest assemblage of Tanks ever mustered for one action. Besides the regular fighting machines there were supply and salvage Tanks, and the new Mark V. Stars designed for carrying infantry. The Whippets were to act as usual in combination with their own tame aeroplane squadron—which combination in this battle was remarkably efficacious.

The advance was on an eleven-mile front, and so the full weight of Tank metal was compressed within proper confines and (no less important) supply dumps were easily get-at-able. This arrangement offered a cheering comparison with the sixty-mile dispersion of 21st March.

In fact, it was an index of the salutary change of heart of our High Command. The pressure of events (in this case the two brilliant Tank actions at Villers-Bretonneux and Beaumont-Hamel) had pierced through the wooden walls of conservative prejudice, forcing a belated recognition of the Tanks' fighting worth. Henceforth they were to be the apple of the eye of G.H.Q., placed in the forefront of every big push as a *corps d'élite*, and, what was even more miraculous, mentioned on the first page of dispatches.

David has moved house from the cave of Adullam to the Royal Palace at Jerusalem: the Tanks have gone up in the world—from the basement to the front parlour. In a word, they are now "IT."

Amiens was largely an Overseas show, for the Anzac

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and Canadian Corps both formed part of the 4th Army, the only other infantry being the 3rd Corps, reinforced by the Cavalry Corps. That may account for the noticeably smooth interaction of the Tanks and Foot, as they had had repeated experience of combined action during the previous month.

Once more there was no advertising bombardment, and, further, the enemy had been skilfully hoodwinked by well thought-out camouflage as to the locality of our attack. Far to the north, in the First Army area, we had made most detailed bogus preparations: erecting dressing-stations and H.Q. collecting-dumps, and turning out many squadrons of aeroplanes for map-making. No Tanks were visible in the Amiens district, but it was a stiff problem to mask the tremendous noise of over 400 powerful engines as the Tanks were moved up to their taking-off positions. Our Staff, however, was equal to the emergency, and muffled the volume of sound by sending up flights of our noisiest aeroplanes, which manœuvre drew the requisite wool over the enemy's eyes. Our surprise-packet, then, was not prematurely opened by the Bosche, but the Tanks delivered the goods with such swift ruthlessness that the first day's haul brought in 16,000 prisoners and 200 guns.

There was one small inky blot on the scroll of the Tanks' record, and that was dropped by the Mark V. Stars. As already described, these Tanks were an extension of the idea of the gun-carrying Tanks. They were built for transporting parties of infantry. The hopeful inventor conceived of a fleet of these machines charging into the thick of the foe, and then the doors flung open and stalwart bombers and bayoneteers leaping out on the already discomfited Bosche and annihilating the survivors.

He must have been a Homeric scholar and have taken his idea from the Wooden Horse. He had not allowed

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for one all-important factor, the need of fresh air. Unluckily the ventilation in Mark V. was at the best not up to L.C.C. standards, and even the leather-lunged Tankites could endure it for only a limited period. The wretched infantry crowded in that fume-laden iron prison soon succumbed, and when they reached the leaping-out place it was the Tank's crew which had to take charge and remove the entire semi-asphyxiated detachment one by one, lay them out in rows, and wait for the natural oxygen to bring them round. The Mark V. Star was never mentioned in the hearing of any infantryman ever afterwards. The latter preferred dying in the open like gentlemen to what one forceful Colonial described as being "corpsed inside a stink-box."

This, fortunately, was the only blemish: in all other respects the Tanks exceeded expectations. The unconventional Anzac was an ideal partner: he even placed an N.C.O. in every Tank as an observer. In this way liaison between the infantry battalion and its shepherd Tank was most efficiently maintained. The same cannot be said of the Whippets and cavalry: the combined action here was a failure. A galloping horse cannot moderate his pace to the average seven and a half miles per hour of a Whippet, and one of the results of 8th August was to divorce these two units permanently, and restore the Whippets to the arms of their true "opposite number"—the more adaptable aeroplane.

A detailed account of this pivot engagement has already appeared in every war record, so therefore only the Tanks' own contribution to the victory will be considered.

The first day, with its seven-mile advance and huge haul of prisoners and guns, tried the Tanks severely, so that on the morrow only 155 out of the 480 were fit for further action.

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This worried the Colonials, both for their own and the Tanks' sake. Some ingenious Aussie thereupon suggested a means of reducing Tank casualties. Nine-tenths of these were caused by enemy field guns. He devised a protective arm for the Tanks—snipers were detailed to pick off the German gunners before they could get their guns trained on advancing Tanks. This original idea worked out well on the second day, and reduced materially the number of Tanks knocked out.

Still, by the third day of the battle the effective machines had fallen to 85, and before the next morning most of these were on the ineffective list. This was the issue of rather an ambitious scheme of General Monash's, the Anzac C.-in-C., nothing less than an attempt to pinch off the whole salient created by our rapid advance, which involved a simultaneous attack from two sides. The attempt had to be made after nightfall, and was a pure gamble. The Bosches were unusually wakeful, particularly the night squadrons, and by persistent bombing thoroughly disorganized the formation of the advancing Tanks. A further drawback was the impossibility of locating enemy guns in the dark otherwise than by the direct and unpleasant method of receiving a salvo from them. Consequently the attack was called off, under cover of all the Tanks' six-pounders and machine guns popping off generally, in a hopeful way, into the blue.

The depleted Tanks could scrape together only 38 machines for the last day of the first phase, but of them 10, belonging to the 2nd Battalion, did magnificently in enabling the Australians to capture the key-position of Lihons.

In the four days of continuous fighting over 600 Tanks had been put in, and most of these were now mechanically unfit. Against that they had the satisfaction of sharing in the haul of 22,000 prisoners and over 400 guns.

Before we pass on to the second phase, ten days later,

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there are two acts of superb self-abnegation to be recorded.

Where such large numbers of Tanks were used, it follows that the deeds of individual gallantry of their crews were equally numerous. One man stands out, a worthy peer of Captain Clement Robertson, V.C., reviving the chivalry, the debonair courage and leadership of a Bayard. This was Major Richard Annesley West, who took a strenuous part in every action of the Amiens battle right up to 2nd September, which gloriously ended his life and added one more to the Tank Corps' V.C.'s.

At Guillancourt, on the 8th, when still Second-in-Command of the 6th Battalion, his personal bravery was magnetic. Refusing the shelter of a Tank, he spotted targets for his machines from horseback, and had two horses shot under him before the day closed. He and his orderly accounted for a dozen of the enemy. The next day, at great personal risk, he reconnoitred the ground before Le Quesnoy, and so enabled our cavalry to make a successful and cheap advance; and later he rallied, under very heavy machine-gun fire, the derelict crews of many ditched Tanks, and safely conducted them back under cover of dark. He received the immediate award of an M.C.

Eleven days later he again went into the fight with his Battalion, which he commanded for most of the day, as the C.O. was killed quite early on. Colonel West had the gift of infusing his own fearlessness into others even when not under his own command. There was a heavy mist until nearly midday, and the infantry whom he was supporting lost direction, and in some cases lost heart as well. This could not go on, as nothing is more infectious than faint-heartedness: so Colonel West, once more mounted, rallied and reanimated these wandering bodies of men, carrying them forward on the wave of his own enthusiasm, and once when he lost his

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horse he continued his volunteer work on foot. This took place before Courcelles, on the 21st, and it was West who actually was the first to enter the village, leading the retrieved infantry forward in the face of heavy machine-gun fire. By his inspiring initiative he enabled them to capture this, the main objective of their attack. A bar to his D.S.O. commemorated the exploit.

In the 2nd of September operations he was given a battalion of light Tanks, which were to drive home the first advance of our combined infantry and heavy Tanks. Colonel West accordingly rode forward to our front line with the advancing troops, in order to follow the progress of their preliminary attack and select the right moment for rushing forward his own light Tanks. But our advance was by no means decisive, and the enemy were counter-attacking vigorously as Colonel West rode on to the scene. One infantry battalion had lost nearly all its officers, and, further, had its flanks exposed. Without a senior officer the battalion was almost at sea, ripe for a precipitate retreat. West sized up the situation and acted. Urging his horse forward, he passed through the ranks to the front, with the enemy now less than 100 yards away, and stiffened the badly shaken battalion by sheer sang-froid. Under a cloud of machine-gun and rifle bullets he deliberately picked out N.C.O.'s to take the place of fallen officers. Still the battalion had not quite plucked up heart again : so, in what was to be his final act of self-sacrifice, Colonel West rode up and down the front ranks, with inevitable death only a few yards away, heartening and revitalizing every man he spoke to. "Stick it, men ; show them fight ; and for God's sake put up a good fight ! "

He never spoke again, but fell, shot through the heart that had never failed him nor his men.

The battalion no longer wavered, but, with clenched jaws, stood steadily behind the fallen Paladin, repelling

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the attack so fiercely that the enemy were hurled back, a broken and disintegrated rabble. Personality had once more been proved to be the supreme factor in the leadership of men.

Four days earlier, Lieutenant Cecil Harold Sewell, of the 3rd Battalion, was the first Tank subaltern to win the V.C. This officer was a Section Commander of Whippets in action at Frémicourt on the afternoon of 29th August. This advance was proceeding smoothly when one of his Tanks side-slipped, fell into a large shell-hole, turned turtle and burst into flames. They were at the time within short range of the enemy. Sewell did not hestiate. Leaving the shelter of his Tank he rushed to the blazing Whippet alone, determined to try to extricate the crew. The door was jammed against the side of the shell-hole, and the wretched men were apparently doomed. Sewell had picked up an entrenching tool, and with that he furiously attacked the sticky earth blocking the door. He got it clear at last, and was in time to get those inside out alive. As he was returning he spotted one of his own crew lying wounded some way behind his Tank. Dashing across the bullet-pitted open ground, he picked up the wounded man and carried him to the Tank, being hit himself before he reached it. It was his driver who was hurt, so badly that an immediate dressing was necessary before he could be taken into the Tank. Sewell was in the act of binding up the other's wounds (disregarding his own) when he was again hit, fatally. No V.C. of the war was more splendidly earned.

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"THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION"
The end of a tank in the Salient, Spring 1918.

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CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

AT REST

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

At Rest

IT will be recalled that after the first phase of Amiens the Tanks had to be withdrawn for at least ten days to refit. During that time a certain amount of relaxation was possible for all fighting ranks. Quite naturally the Tank Corps officers found it in horse exercise, and adventures and misadventures were numerous. Those of a certain Lieutenant Harrison form quite a chapter. There were several Harrisons commissioned to the Corps, so if any of them reads the following incidents let him be assured they concern some other fellow of the same name.

A diary has come into the editor's possession in which Lieutenant Harrison jotted down his impressions of his successive army mounts. He was not really entitled to a horse at all, but having wangled himself on to the Brigade Staff all lesser wanglings were child's play.

His first horse was a gift to the B.E.F. from the Gaekwar of Baroda: a pure-bred Arab, Zadkiel, all fire, nerves and temperament. The Colonel of Remounts who was looking after Zadkiel told Harrison that he had just the animal for him. Being profoundly bored, he anticipated at least a brief spell of enjoyment from the obviously unskilled subaltern's introduction to Zadkiel. This took place in the Remounts' horse-lines, which were six inches deep all over in pea-soup mud, and dotted with huge mountains of manure. One of these was (so the Colonel hoped) to be Harrison's final resting-place.

Zadkiel was (with some difficulty) bridled and saddled,

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and a grinning R.A.S.C. orderly held him for Harrison to mount. The moment he let go, and before Harrison was barely seated, the Arab left the ground with all four feet simultaneously. Having had a year's experience in India of riding to jolt up his liver, Harrison realized the only possible tactics. Dropping the reins and ignoring the stirrups he concentrated on the saddle, got a good grip fore and aft, and sent dignity to the devil. Together they performed along the horse-lines wondrous evolutions unknown to any *haute école* of equitation. After ten minutes of life at its intensest, Harrison still remained unseated, without having had to adopt the last resort of the about-to-be unhorsed—clasping his mount round the neck. Zadkiel, in the heavy ground, was completely winded, and so amenable.

Harrison descended abruptly, but perpendicularly, and told the Colonel, in gasps, that it was a dirty trick to make sport of the King's Commission before privates. That took the wind out of the other's sails and allowed a dignified exit.

The next animal was blind in one eye and had no vices: he had no virtues either, and so they never became friends. A traction-engine was the immediate cause of their parting brass-rags. Then followed an interregnum, when Harrison, horseless, rode those of his superiors. One horse, belonging to the Brigadier, stood a good 16½ hands, and was a mover. Unfortunately they had to pass under one of our kite-balloons, at which the Bosches were firing shells with the usual false nose-cap. When the next shell burst, the nose-cap shot off entire, and came to earth beside them with a shriek equal to anything Dante could have imagined. The Brigadier's horse objected most violently to this pocket-inferno. So did Harrison. Apart from the nauseating noise, both also realized at the same moment that one shell is generally followed by another. The horse took a firm grip of

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the bit in his teeth, the rider an equally firm grip with his knees, and then they did a fair imitation of the Grand National. Growing obstacles were not regarded, and wide ditches were nothing accounted of. Four miles were covered in a little over fourteen minutes—and that across stiff country. The only untoward result was a wigging from the Brigadier for getting his precious charger into a muck sweat.

Then came the era of Canary Jane. She was as near as possible mustard-powder in colour, and her disposition could be gauged from her ears, which had a permanent list to stern. She came from a Divisional Train, and was said to have blood. She had, but it was all black and bad. She tried to bite when one first mounted, and on every following occasion. A French interpreter told Harrison he was as good as any rough-rider, and would "correct" her. As it was a slack time the whole mess turned out to see him do it in the château meadow. It was, however, our ally who received the lesson. They picked him carefully out of a disused trench, scraped the mud out of his mouth, and let him talk. He had tried spurs and a whip together. Harrison next essayed the old *Punch* recipe, "Feed the brute!" She would snatch a carrot with her lips whilst aiming at his hand with her yellow teeth. Once he was in the saddle, which had to be done before she could nip him in the thigh, all went well at a steady trot until she met something. Then she used to leave the *pavé* either through the hedge or the ditch—always straight through, she did not like jumping. Whenever he had to get off, the only way to remount, if alone, was to unfasten the reins and make her run in a circle with a switch. Once tired she then let Harrison mount: otherwise it was a heaving mustard volcano which refused to stop in one spot long enough for a flying leap. Harrison and she last met in a village, honoured as the birthplace of

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Marshal Petain. A battery of heavies was trotting smartly across the cobbles of the *place*, with every possible kind of bump and jingle, when suddenly they met Jane. She swerved completely round, and left Harrison in the square on his hands and knees. Later, an officer of her original home, the Divisional Train, told Harrison, when rather full of whisky, that she had already savaged a sergeant-major into a Base Hospital.

Jane's successor had a pedigree. The knowing ones, when she arrived, went over her points. They seemed to Harrison to be almost too obtrusive and salient, but the Colonel was certain a fortnight in the horse-lines would fill in the scaffolding; so Harrison agreed to become her lord and master. When his batman led her back she certainly did look showy. Her pace was gentle, and her temper amiable as a rule. Her name was Alice —after the song. One useful quality was her firm dislike of strangers mounting her. One day, when a jocular Major, who had a reputation across country, started pulling Harrison's leg about Alice's meek and sheeplike appearance:

"Try her," snapped her owner, with evil intent.

"Right-o!" The expert mounted carelessly, as on a rocking-horse. But she, full of grass and guile, let herself go at once. Lashing out behind, she threw him well forward on her neck, and then jerked back smartly and caught him on the bridge of the nose with her bony head.

Her successor was Tommy, a sturdy cob. Tommy was the most human horse in the B.E.F. Stocky, spirited and humorous, he was always to be relied on for entertainment. He had many playful ways and decided views. He objected to being held in the approved army manner by the batman at his head with a hand on each bridle. He showed his distaste by rearing the moment his rider put a foot in the stirrup. After two or three efforts,

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with a very close likeness to a sack of coals lying across the saddle, Harrison tumbled to Tommy's point of view, and bade the batman stand clear. Tommy would wait for hours in the rain, on a pitch-dark night, untethered, and the moment his master returned, off he would go straight for home, without needing a guiding hand. He, in very truth, was a dear: much more amusing than most humans and far more intelligent. He did not like Frenchmen (few horses do); and on one occasion he caused a pimply youth, supposed to be a liaison officer, to enter the best hotel in Amiens by the window head first. The latter had taken French leave in borrowing Tommy for the afternoon and was showing off in the city. This was the only occasion a certain Divisional Commander was known to laugh on the right side of his mouth. Tommy's unwanted mount landed fairly in the centre of the General's lunch-party to a pompous politician on a joy-ride for the purpose of seeing how much better he would run the war. It was reported amongst the subalterns that the General nearly became epileptic when the politician was choked by an *omelette aux confitures*, thrust into his open mouth by the clutching hand of the unhappy liaison officer. Anyhow, the General called on Harrison's mess shortly after, having nosed out Tommy's proper owner, and asked to see the stables after tea. He gave Tommy six lumps of sugar and his blessing. The politician did not repeat his visit.

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CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

"MUSICAL BOX"

By

Lieutenant C. B. Arnold, M.C., 6th Battalion Royal Tank Corps from the "Official History of the Royal Tank Corps"

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"*Musical Box*"

MUNCHAUSEN-LIKE yarns have been woven out of every campaign in history, beginning with Herodotus and continuing with Froissart and his present-day imitators; but no more unbelievable story was ever staged than that of a Whippet Tank of B Company, 6th Battalion, yclept "Musical Box." Other men have faced—and will face—unflinchingly "fearful odds" to bring off forlorn hopes, but as a rule they take their adventures in sequence and at due intervals. Lieutenant Arnold, the C.O. of "Musical Box," concentrated a whole lifetime of alarums and excursions within a single revolution of the sun. If his name had been Hawkins or Paul Jones one might have anticipated something buccaneering or swashbuckling, but bearing that of the prim Victorian critic he is an uncharted phenomenon. For what he did with his little Medium A 3 man-power machine was purely phenomenal.

His own version of the events suffers from the common English failing of understatement. We are so fearful of being melodramatic, of laying on the colours too crudely, that we barely sketch in the outlines.

It is an historian's duty to fill in gaps and cover the nakedness of the land with a few flowers of the wayside, indigenous, not imported. They are all there *sub rosa*, and one is only bringing them into the limelight of the public eye.

Army records scorn every ornamental trapping, and stick closely to brass tacks. They are incurably prosaic in describing even poetic happenings, and Lieutenant

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"*MUSICAL BOX*"

Arnold's lone-handed assault on the German Army was not a whit less epic than the defence of the Tiber bridge by Horatius Cocles.

He was in command, with Gunner Ribbans and Driver Carney as his crew; their united ages being under threescore.

"Musical Box" left the lying-up point at 4.20 A.M., zero-hour, on 8th August 1918, and proceeded (the sacred B.E.F. word which embraces going on leave and going over the top) to the south side of the railway at Villers-Bretonneux.

"We crossed the railway and passed through the Australian infantry and some of our heavy (Mark V.) Tanks. Four sections of B Company went across country due east.

"After 2000 yards I was alone, the others being ditched. To the immediate front I could see more Mark V. Tanks, closely followed by Australian infantry. I came under direct fire from a German four-gun field battery."

What that means can be more or less visualized when one remembers that a field gun can fire ten to twenty rounds a minute—forty-eight shells to one hectic minute.

The battery was close enough for him to see the gun flashes between Aboucourt and Bayonvillers, and the shooting so accurate as to knock out two Mark V. Tanks alongside "Musical Box."

That only strung up Arnold. "I turned half-left and ran diagonally across the front of the battery at 600 yards range"—manœuvering so that both his guns could fire at once. The Bosche could do the same, and pumped in over thirty shells before Arnold got under cover of a belt of trees. He was not however going to earth, but doing an outflanking move: "I ran along until level with the battery, when I turned full half-right and attacked it in the rear."

A field gun cannot fire fore and aft, and so the Bosches

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sensibly ran for their lives. "Gunner Ribbans and I finished them off." Lieutenant Arnold then becomes slightly nautical: "I cruised forward, making a detour to the left, and shot a number of the enemy who appeared to be demoralized." This was merely in beating about on the other tack, and he does not even count his slain, but resumes his cruise on to "the railway siding N.N.W. of Guillancourt."

His destruction of the German battery had an immediate effect, for he now records: "The Australians also had advanced and were taking cover in a sunken road 400 yards in advance of the abandoned battery" —a quarter-of-a-mile gain of ground at no cost to the infantry.

At this point Arnold allowed himself a breather: "I got out and asked an Australian Lieutenant if he wanted any help, and he was struck by a bullet in the shoulder during our talk." What a spot to select for a little quiet talk where bullets strike one in the shoulder, perhaps lower! It reminds one of a corner near the railway crossing at Philosophe, in the Loos Salient, where a sentry was posted to warn troops not to loiter there as it was the frequent landing-place of very large Bosche shells. That was the popular practice-ground for footballers amongst the troops billeted in the village, and on one occasion, a Sunday, the Deputy Chaplain-General (an old Welsh International) did a very fine drop-kick across the line.

To return to the C.O. of "Musical Box" chatting with the Aussies. He was now joined by Major Rycroft and Lieutenant Waterhouse of his own Corps, and decided he must be doing some more damage: "I then followed the railway east and came up with two cavalry patrols of twelve men each" (which he, luckily for them, recognized as our own) "who were being fired at by a party of the enemy, hiding in standing corn. I dealt with

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them." There is a deadly brevity about those four words which are the winding-sheet of the Germans hiding in the corn. "Going farther east, I came across a second patrol pursuing the enemy. The leading horse was so tired that he could not gain on the Hun . . . and with his sword stretched out at the back of the Hun his rider was shot down." Arnold has the artist's eye. He makes you see the stumbling horse and its rider straining forward, and the flying German suddenly realizing that he is safe and turning to fire fatally at his pursuer. But Arnold the artist is also Arnold the practical soldier.

"I dealt with that party who had taken up a position on the railway bridge." They were not of the family of Horatius, and when "Musical Box" heaved herself on to one end of the bridge they tumbled off the other end —at least, the few survivors did—whilst Arnold went on his destructive way.

"Proceeding farther east (*i.e.* always in the direction of Berlin) I entered a valley marked on my map as containing Bosche hutments. As I entered many were packing kit. . . . As I opened fire crowds more appeared and made for the embankment and safety; I accounted for many of them. I cruised round, and Ribbans went out and counted the slain, about sixty."

There were probably about 600 Bosches, and yet Gunner Ribbans left the shelter of the Tank to do his little sum.

"I turned left from the railway and cruised across country, where lines of enemy infantry could be seen retiring. We fired at these from 200 to 600 yards range. As our cruise lasted an hour, we inflicted much damage."

Arnold was now absolutely in the blue—an island entirely surrounded by undiluted Huns.

"I did not see any more of our troops or machines after leaving the cavalry patrols."

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Consequently he drew all the fire, from every kind of weapon that the harassed Bosches could bring to bear on "Musical Box," which kept on playing her own devil's tattoo in reply. The only thing to do was to keep on moving, like the stormy petrel in a typhoon. At this point Arnold inserts a mild protest: "I would beg to suggest that no petrol tins should be carried on the outside [of Tanks] as we did, as they were always being perforated by bullets and the fumes of the burning petrol made breathing so difficult that we had to use our box-respirators, having been in action about ten hours."

Ten hours in action with the very likely prospect of being burned alive, or at any rate asphyxiated, would have damped most men's fire for further adventuring, but not Arnold's. "At about 2 P.M. I again proceeded east, and arrived at a large aerodrome with a captive balloon and a great quantity of horse-transport and motors." What he did to the balloon is not mentioned, but most probably he brought it down, having stampeded the motors and transport.

"Over the top of another bridge I could see a lorry coming in my direction." "Musical Box" lay *perdu* in a hollow and waited. As soon as the Hun topped the bridge, the Whippet leapt forward and rammed him backwards into the ditch.

"The railway was now quite close, and I could see long lines of men retiring along it at ranges of 400 to 500 yards. I fired at them and did much damage. Leaving these in a state of panic, 'Musical Box' looked round for more exciting quarry. Passing by a two-horse canvased waggon, I knocked that out—Gunner Ribbans (R.H. gun) did some good shooting on the motor and horse transport, whilst I fired many bursts at 600 to 800 yards on the transport blocking the roads on the left (L.H. gun). I turned quarter-left to a small

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copse. On the way we came under the most intense rifle and machine-gun fire (bullet splash). The L.H. revolver port-cover was shot away. I withdrew the forward gun, locked the mounting and held the body of the gun against the hole." This was pretty level-headed after over ten hours' delirious brain-storm. Arnold kept his balance, and if only the Fates had done the same it is conceivable that he would have overrun the German Army H.Q. His luck, however, ran out, like the petrol on the cab, and he describes it without bitterness: "Petrol was still running down the inside of the back door (of course ignited). As it was no longer possible to continue the action, I shouted to Driver Carney to turn about, when two heavy concussions closely followed each other and the cab burst into flames." (At last a field gun had got in a knock-out blow.)

If there ever was a situation for losing one's head it was then, when they were trapped in a burning Tank, choked by petrol fumes and worn from want of sleep and food. "Carney and Ribbans got to the door and collapsed. I was almost overcome, but managed to get the door open, fell out on to the ground and was able to drag out the other two. Burning petrol was running on to the ground where we were lying. The fresh air revived us and we all got up, and made a short rush to get away from the burning petrol. We were all on fire."

Now is the moment for the chivalrous foe to charge forward with army blankets to the rescue! Not a bit of it! "In this rush, Carney was shot in the stomach and killed." The other two, apparently, were saved from this peril by the more pressing danger. "We rolled over and over to extinguish the flames," and so were harder to hit.

Our code is not to hit a fellow when he is down, but that is not the *Code d'Allemagne*.

"I saw numbers of the enemy approaching from all

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FLAME-THROWERS AGAINST TANK

This is a German official war photograph. In the foreground will be seen the enemy infantry in their front-line trench; on the right is a flame-thrower in action against the advancing British tank.

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round. The first arrival came at me with a rifle and bayonet. I got hold of this and the front of the bayonet entered my forearm. The second man struck at my head with the butt of his rifle, which glanced off and hit my shoulder, knocking me out. When I came to, there were dozens all round me, and everyone who could reach me did so, and I was well kicked." This was not worthy of the fellow-countrymen of the Crown Prince, who sent New Year Greetings at Verdun to his chivalrous foe, General Sarrail. Anyhow, "they were furious," and forgot all about the *Barmherzlichkeit* due to a fallen foe; and one in a state of combustion. The kicks, however, did stamp out the flames, so they served some purpose.

"We were eventually marched to a dug-out. Later, we marched past a field-kitchen (a cruel stroke!). I made signs for food. We had had nothing since 8.30 P.M. the previous night, and it was 8.30 P.M. when we were set on fire. Then I was taken before an elderly Staff Officer and interrogated. As I always answered: "I do not know," he said: "You mean you do not know, or you will not tell me?" I said: "You can take it whichever way you wish." (To which Arnold must have added under his breath "and be damned to you!" For something in his "dumb insolence" made that Hun officer and gentleman descend to the level of the kicking privates, for) "He then struck me in the face and went away"—presumably to weep over the downfall of his own decorum.

Arnold was sent back to the rear, but he does not say anything about being fed: only that they put paper bandages on some of his wounds but left his scarred face alone.

"The second time I was interrogated I received five days' solitary confinement in a room with no window—this time with a little soup and bread thrown in. This

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did nothing towards breaking his contumacious spirit, as "the next time I was interrogated I told the officer he had no right to give me solitary confinement and that I would report him to the highest authority."

That threat, most awful to the authority-ridden German soul, had its effect; and "I was then sent to Freiburg, where I met my brother."

The only fitting climax to this ascending series of adventures would have been for the brothers Arnold to escape from the prison-camp and return through the German lines to report to their respective units. They did not, unfortunately, see their way to doing so.

In the camp near Canterbury, in January 1919, through which our prisoners-of-war were distributed to their homes, one of those met there by the present writer was Gunner Ribbans.

Lieutenant Arnold ends his own tale in the way those who know him would expect: "The conduct of Gunner Ribbans and Driver Carney was beyond all praise; throughout, Driver Carney drove from Villers-Bretonneux (4.20 P.M. 18th till 8.30 P.M. 19th)."

The amount of damage actually and morally inflicted on the enemy by those three Englishmen in their Whippet was about equal to that which a brigade of infantry could have wrought at the cost of half of their effectives. It is, in the opinion of one of the least hysterical historians of the late war, the most fruitful individual achievement on record.

It was not fireworks, which make a prodigious noise and end in smoke, but the stroke of another Attila—"the Scourge of God." He too harassed the Teutons of his day.

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CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN

THE TANKS' COUP DE GRÂCE

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Tanks' Coup de Grâce

CASUALTIES to machines and men during the protracted battle from 8th August to the end of the month had been devastatingly heavy.

The Tanks were between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand were the infantry divisions clamouring for their trusty well-proven shields, on the other the Tank Corps Staff tearing their hair as they strained to turn broken-down derelicts into fresh fighting material.

Tanks of some sort had to be forthcoming for each successive push, and, to the eternal credit of the Workshops' Staff, they were. Men worn out with long spells of confinement in a poisonous atmosphere, where the enemy's gas not infrequently supplemented their own mephitic fumes, allowed themselves only an inadequate few days' rest before returning to carry on their job of heading the next attack. This went on for a solid two months of practically incessant fighting, and then the Corps had most reluctantly to stand aside for a clear fortnight.

Eight hundred and nineteen machines had been handed over for repairs since 8th August. Out of a total strength of 1500 officers, 550 (over a third) had become casualties. The losses of the other ranks were slightly less heavy—2587 out of 8000.

These figures are official, and effectually dispel any foolish notions still lingering amongst the disgruntled that the Tank Corps men had a " cushy " time.

The nervous strain of being in action for many hours at a stretch, not responsible merely for one's own

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behaviour, but also for that of a high-powered machine as temperamental as a thoroughbred, can only be paralleled by that of the airmen, and their flights were very rarely of long duration. The Tanks went on as a rule until they received a quietus in the form of a direct hit, and then the crews removed their armament and transformed themselves into machine gunners. Colonel Fuller's decision, made at the Passchendaele battle, that a Tank crew was not to withdraw when their Tank was rendered useless, continued to hold good until the end of the war. A cavalryman's effectiveness is reduced by a good half, or even more, once he has lost his horse, but the crew of an immobilized Tank remains a destructive unit, which in some cases was a most decisive element in beating off enemy attacks or reanimating our own.

A case in point is that of Second Lieutenant David Leslie Skippon of the 14th Battalion. It occurred in the action near Villers-lez-Cagnicourt on 2nd September.

His Tank, which had outstripped the infantry, was receiving very warm attention from the German field gunners. Skippon, however, kept calm, and by clever manœuvring was able to hit back with such vigour as not only to hold up the advancing Bosches but even gain ground against them. He was, however, a conspicuous target, and inevitably the German gunners got home, not once but repeatedly. The damage was irreparable, and, besides, Skippon and every member of his crew were badly wounded.

Even then the good name of the Corps came first, and their own safety took a back seat. Forming his men outside the burning Tank, Skippon improvised a physically shaky but undaunted Lewis-gun detachment. Every man was a casualty, but every man lent a hand with the guns. The enemy, however, advancing once more against this enfeebled handful, had no difficulty in

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capturing them, their spirit being the only real resistance they had to offer. But the definite check had given our infantry time to rush forward in turn, and falling on Skippon's captors they trounced them soundly and released the whole of the wounded men. It was subsequently reported by the infantry that Skippon's gallant action was the prime agent of their own highly successful advance. His devotion to duty was an inspiration to every man who witnessed it.

Heavy casualties inevitably entail a tremendous strain on that part of the army which is the most inarticulate, and consequently least self-advertising—the stretcher-bearers.

When the average reader, who, too, may have no personal experience of modern war, thinks of the wounded being evacuated and tended, he usually forms a mind-picture of sweet-faced nurses and noiseless, indefatigable R.A.M.C. orderlies, flanked with spotless sheets and hot-water bottles, and embowered in disinfectants and cut flowers (the two last in counteraction).

The first thing to be made clear is that no nursing sister was allowed nearer to the line than a Casualty Clearing Station. In front of that was the Main Field Ambulance, and a mile or two farther on its Advanced Dressing Station, and closest to the enemy came the Regimental Aid-Post.

The latter pair were (if possible) in cellars, or at any rate underground—for obvious reasons. They were staffed from two sources: first, the Field Ambulance, and second, the regimental stretcher-bearers, who were ordinary combatants detailed for this job from each unit. The M.O. of the fighting troops had a dug-out generally in a second-line trench, and was in charge of the Regimental Aid-Post, assisted by one R.A.M.C. corporal.

The stretcher-bearers were under his orders once the

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fight was started. In the considered opinion of many competent medical and lay judges, these men, with but an elementary St John's Ambulance training, did more than any other body to save our wounded men's lives; and, further, did their most dangerous work with such gallant nonchalance as was never surpassed in the fighting forces.

It has not come to the writer's notice that any due acknowledgement of the British army's debt to its regimental stretcher-bearers has ever been officially or non-officially placed on record.

The Tank Corps' representatives of these unsung gallants were well up to standard, and during August and September 1918 they had a gruelling time, with few opportunities of relief.

The following incident, taken from the note-book of an R.A.M.C. corporal, gives some idea of what the evacuation of wounded really involves, and shows the two sides of Aid-Post work:

"At 4.30 P.M. an order came: 'Bearer-party to proceed to Le Rutol Farm immediately.' We knew there was an attack on and so everyone was prepared, and within quarter of an hour we were off—an M.O. and thirty men. They were keen to do something after a week's inaction, so they stepped bravely out towards the unknown. As we approached Lihons the war suddenly became imminent. Shattered wrecks of houses, stumps of trees, twisted girders and shaftless carts, abandoned by the roadside, the gaunt shell of the Church, and above all the uncanny stillness of the shadow of death which broods over the line—all this began to stir the men's nerves, but they went steadily on. They were not old soldiers, but a brand-new relief.

"After an hour's miserable floundering through the mud churned up by thousands of feet, and littered with debris of the last fight, we reached the tunnel

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under the road which was the daylight way into the Farm buildings. We had arrived at our Base, an old French dug-out, cupola-lined. Another small bearer-party from the line was already there and welcomed the reinforcement.

"Our men were given a breather, and then the whole of us set off for the Plum Tree, about a mile across the open. The C.O. and myself walked ahead with the guide, a tough old N.C.O. It was now the actual battle-field and we were approaching the old German front-line trenches. At first the bullets came by ones and twos, and the shells were bursting almost out of range, but after we had crossed two or three of our own rough trench bridges, and came in sight of Plum Tree itself, they began to thicken. There was a faint misty moon-light which does *not* increase your courage and does very highly quicken your imagination. And when some Tommies' heads were suddenly thrust out of a trench we were crossing (our own support line), it made us all jump. I can't recall ever seeing anything more eerie than Plum Tree looked, as it stood out in the dismal light—the only tree visible—like one of Gustav Doré's pictures: not a leaf left on it, and seared and blighted by splinters and shell-fumes.

"The wounded, whom other stretcher-bearers had carried from the Aid-Post, were lying on stretchers near a small dug-out, which at the most would hold four men, and then only protect them from pip-squeaks. Our job was to get them down to the Farm as quickly as possible. No one stayed near that spot a minute longer than they could help, as it was continually being shelled; so it was cruel to keep the wounded waiting. Two men to a stretcher were all we could afford, and that meant hard work for a mile walk over rough and shell-pitted ground and trenches but roughly bridged. The C.O. took one end of the convoy and I took the other, to hold the

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men together. Bullets were coming thickly now, with every shade of sound between a whistle and a whine; and it was a positive steadier to have the solid weight of the stretcher to occupy the mind as well as blister the hands. We had stumbled over three-quarters of the distance, and the walls of the Farm loomed up, when a shriek, growing shriller every second, sent our hearts into our boots. 'Drop!' yelled the C.O., and bearers and wounded flattened themselves out. Two shrapnel burst overhead and some hundreds of bullets swished over and smashed into the wall beyond. Two seconds' difference in the time-fuse would have finished us to a man. Then up again and on. The last few hundred yards were done in a rush, with an occasional drop, but no other shells came as close.

"The united party had a short rest in dug-outs and a little supper, and then started back. This time we met the shells going up. Now we had to go further forward past Plum Tree, and right up to the Regimental Aid-Post, half-a-mile on in a small quarry. In the bottom of this a brazier was dully burning, and all round the sides dozens of wounded were lying on the ground. They had been brought down from the fighting line in small wooden trucks on a little trench railway running right up to the lip of the pit. In this miserable place the Regimental M.O. worked and cheered men all night.

"Hot tea was kept continually going, as the night was chilly for the poor broken lads, and there were unavoidable delays before the stretcher-bearers could evacuate the whole of the pit.

"Behind it ran an old second-line German trench, and details of our men were passing along this most of the time we were there; and, as the moon had now set, sometimes losing touch with one another.

"Their dark shadows moved across the back of the quarry, thrown into relief for a few seconds by the

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Véry lights, and one caught confused shouts of 'Close up!' 'Keep touch!'—and then they passed into the night.

"Here in the quarry there was a continuous going and coming of the bearers and their burdens. A trench truck would creep up out of the blackness and then came a quiet command: 'Two bearers this way,' 'Steady, men, take him easy,' and the man was lowered gently beside the M.O. for his first expert examination.

"Throbbing across the pit from side to side was the faint continuous moaning of suffering men, covered almost at once by the many noises of the night outside. In front and all round us came sharp bursts of shells, crack and roll of rifle fire, and that unique sound as of tropical rain which is Lewis or Hotchkiss fire. No time was wasted in making up another convoy and we started back again—this time with an extra half-mile to go. The night was naturally darker, lacking the moonshine, so the going was more difficult, but the white chalk of the trench parapets gave a good deal of help and the Véry lights kept going all the time.

"Over towards the enemy the dark was continually cut up by the flashes of gun-discharges. These were also a warning, as from one direction they were followed by the shell itself coming our way, and we soon grew shell-canny enough to drop at once the moment we spotted them.

"We only had the full charge hurtling over quite close once more, and no one was hurt. You felt it was a kind of charm to be carrying someone—that nothing could happen to either of you—quite an illusion but comforting.

"That trip four of us had to carry a badly wounded officer who was a very big man. He was in great pain, and the path was so rough that it was a tremendous

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strain to avoid jolting him. However, at last we got him safely down to the motor-ambulances, which were waiting under the lee of the Farm.

"Stretcher-bearing is hard work for the orderlies and keeps them from getting jumpy. They had to go on all night, the last trip being at 6 A.M. next morning; and the men had been on their feet, with short rests only, since 4.30 P.M. the previous day. Their movements were almost purely mechanical, and they just staggered along, with only their inherited grit to keep them going, without any real control of their limbs."

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CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

THE HINDENBURG LINE

Material from the "Official History of the Royal Tank Corps" and the "Book of Honour"

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Hindenburg Line

BY titanic efforts the Tank Corps workshops were able to get into fighting trim sufficient machines to have a decisive influence in our culminating attack of 2nd September on the Drocourt—Quéant line. The capture of this threw open the approach to the Germans' last barrier—the Hindenburg Line, of which the former was a spur. Our repeated heavy blows right through the previous month had told, and 2nd September was a comparatively light day for the two Tank Corps Brigades involved—the 1st and 3rd. The enemy put up only a feeble fight, and after evacuating their holdings fell back gratuitously on the following day. This gave our Whippets an opening and they, harrying the dispirited Bosche, pushed ahead as far as Hermies and Dernicourt. Second Lieutenant Samuel Pavey particularly distinguished himself near Villers-lez-Cagnicourt. He started most unfortunately by having his Tank incapacitated the moment it reached the first objective. Pavey, temporarily unhorsed, looked round for another mount. He found it in a second Tank, of whose crew all but two had become casualties, though the machine itself was still workable. Pavey immediately got together a fresh crew and took over. Forging straight ahead he reached his second objective, incidentally clearing up the village of Cagnicourt.

The nearest infantry detachment was at the time in difficulties, and appealed to Pavey. Though he had been very badly shaken in the destruction of his first Tank, and was now utterly exhausted, he pulled himself

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together resolutely and took his Tank into action for the third time. The blot on the landscape was a factory which had been turned into a fort by the enemy and was impregnable to infantry assault. Pavey charged this with his Tank, and for the second time that day had his machine knocked out. Unflustered, he evacuated his men and established a strong point, whence he directed such a murderous fire on the Bosche machine gunners as to drive them pell-mell out of their factory. In this critical exploit he and his crew were absolutely on their own, no infantry support being available. He was awarded an M.C.

Some noteworthy actions were performed by other ranks in this engagement.

Private Walter Sidell of the 6th Battalion showed himself a stout fellow. He was No. 1 gunner of a Whippet and went into action near Vaulx-Vraucourt.

Whilst his machine was in the act of overrunning an enemy machine-gun emplacement in their front line it became ditched—a most impossible situation in which to remain alive. The Bosche promptly got on to the Whippet with every gun within range, and knocked it to pieces, setting the engine on fire and wounding the officer, driver and second gunner. Private Sidell got out his fellow-gunner first (the most seriously hurt), and dressed his wounds. Then he and the wounded officer between them carried him back to one of our forward machine-gun posts. Leaving his officer there as well, Sidell returned alone across the open to dress the driver, Private Tacchi, who was severely hit in the body. Sidell was all this time under severe fire, intensified as he came nearer the enemy. The latter, ungenerously, were now firing with machine guns from three sides at this man whose only intent was to save his pal's life. Still he imperturbably finished dressing Tacchi's wounds and then started back with the helpless man. He was

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THE PASSING OF THE HINDENBURG LINE

Tanks going into action near Bellicourt, September 29th, 1918, and carrying cribs for crossing wide trenches and canals.

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too heavy to carry, so Sidell had to drag him—slowly, to minimize the pain—across the open back to safety. The Bosches seemed to be purely vindictive, and resolved to finish them off, for they actually concentrated their fire on the pair.

For two hours Sidell laboured on, using every available bit of shelter. It was a terrific effort for a man already all but worn out, but he won through and saved Tacchi's life. This was no act of impulse, but a steady concentration of grit and gumption, which are not infrequently combined in our British make-up.

The 6th Battalion are specially proud of his D.C.M.

Corporal James Bell of the 12th Battalion also did well, first at Gouricourt on 23rd August, and then near Noreuil on 2nd September. His Tank Commander had been seriously wounded, and the Corporal took over command.

The Tank, which had just received a direct hit, was then a hundred yards in front of our infantry. Bell manned one six-pounder gun, the other being damaged, and soon dominated the enemy machine guns. He then evacuated safely the crew and formed them into Lewis-gun posts, returning alone to his Tank later to get further supplies of guns and ammunition. This manœuvre enabled our infantry to move forward and past him. As his usefulness was for the time being at an end, Corporal Bell led back his detachment to Company H.Q. for further orders.

At Noreuil on 2nd September his Tank had again far outstripped the infantry, and whilst busy in destroying machine-gun nests it became hopelessly ditched, and very naturally was shortly afterwards knocked out. This shell badly wounded the Tank Commander. Bell, with unusual coolness, took over once more, and carried out an orderly evacuation. Then, with one of the crew, he carried back the wounded officer to safety, a journey

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of over 300 yards under continuous shell and machine-gun fire. Returning to the ditched Tank, he spent the next two hours trying to get it into running order. This work was, of course, done under heavy fire. It was only when our infantry had passed through, overwhelming the Bosche resistance, that the Corporal abandoned ship.

Private Sidell's and Corporal Bell's gallantry within a single week is on the same plane as Colonel West's V.C.

Every Tank Corps V.C. was awarded posthumously, but the Corps is fortunate in still containing men whose deeds fell very little short of that supreme award. These two appear in no respect unworthy to be ranked with any V.C., and as serving members of the Corps would have had the special inspiration of personal contact.

Alas, imagination is not fostered by an army training!

There was really no individual Jena or Sedan in the final stages of the united onslaught on the crumbling Bosche. It was like the infighting of the ring, deadly but inconspicuous. The amazing obstinacy of the Bosche resistance is undoubtedly to the sole credit of the most highly trained and most high-spirited section of their forces—the machine gunners. When we consider that they were the Tanks' main quarry, that from August to November 1918 detachments were repeatedly crushed out of existence, without a single survivor, in one engagement after another, and yet that they rarely, if ever, failed to offer an equally stout resistance the next time we attacked, we cannot withhold from a gallant foe the respect certainly felt for them by our Tank crews.

We can claim, indeed, the Big Push of 27th September to 9th October as little short of a devastating enemy *débâcle*. The initiative now was entirely with Foch and Haig. They thrust when and where they pleased, and each thrust lowered in an increasing ratio the sinking morale of the enemy.

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On 27th September opened a vast offensive, employing all the available British forces except our Second Army, which was in Italy under Plumer. This was to shatter the final bulwark—the Hindenburg Line. The Tanks were on holy ground in one sector, for it was the scene of the first battle of Cambrai. Their old enemy—the Canal du Nord—was once more in front of them, not a whit less wide and even more formidable, as the enemy had made the banks in places quite perpendicular. In the First Army area, 15 out of 16 Tanks with the Canadian Corps made a successful crossing near Mœuvres—a very fine piece of driving; 26 Tanks with the Third Army fought well and gained Bourlon Wood and Flesquières, but lost 11 machines in the day.

On the Fourth Army Front, after a skirmishing first day, we put in 175 Tanks, but the Bosche stiffened his resistance and we failed to move him. To the south, the Siamese Twins—Anzacs and Tanks of the Third Army—were the first to pierce the Hindenburg Line itself, at Nauroy and Bellicourt. Owing to the Fourth Army check their northern flank was exposed, but their mechanical allies, acting on their own initiative, rushed every available machine to the threatened wing and carried the fight into the enemy's country as the best way to forestall his attack. South of the Anzacs our IX. Corps were equally fortunate in carrying the Saint-Quentin Canal, and though their Tanks could not cross at the same point they were determined to be in at the death, so charging south at full speed they crossed there and swung up north again, arriving with perfect synchronization to share in the capture of Magny, with 4000 prisoners.

This second battle of Cambrai—Saint-Quentin was long drawn-out, concluding only on 9th October, when the famous Hindenburg defences, on which for more than two years the best German engineering brains had

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worked, were reduced to the same state as the walls of Jericho. Our troops had penetrated on a Front of thirty miles to a depth of twenty miles, and roped in 680 guns and 48,000 men. The long night was ending and the Sun of Austerlitz rising once more. Now, and right up to the Armistice, the Bosche was on the run, and most engagements were more or less rearguard actions.

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CHAPTER
NINETEEN

THE HINDENBURG LINE—*Continued*

Material from the Tank Corps "Book of Honour"

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Hindenburg Line (continued)

IN this fight the 301st American Tank Battalion fought as part of our own Tank force (a splendid example of comradeship in surrendering their own independence of action). They fought uncommonly well, and many officers and men were decorated. Second Lieutenant Ernest Kusener's (of the 301st) conduct was that of a "very gallant gentleman." On 29th September, in front of Ronssoy, his Tank was put out of action by a shell which killed outright four of the crew and set the Tank on fire. Forcing his way into the blazing interior, Kusener hauled out the remainder of the crew, seriously wounded and helpless. Unaided, he carried these survivors one by one to the nearest dressing station. He made two trips over a considerable distance, the ground being continuously swept by the enemy machine gunners, and after innumerable escapes survived as one of the fittest.

Another young American, Second Lieutenant Earl Dunning, on the same day showed a resourcefulness and courage up to the best traditions of the U.S.A. regular forces. He had reached his objective (a point north of Le Catelet) ahead of all his associates, and was consequently in a position of "splendid isolation"—in plain English, an excellent target for a Bosche concentrated "hate." Realizing this, he moved his Tank forward again, and crossed the Escaut river (the streamlet which at Antwerp is the highway of huge liners). That ended his Tank's existence, for shortly afterwards it received three successive well-aimed shells and was reduced to

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burning scrap-iron. Earl Dunning, with unabated *sang-froid*, having removed his crew, located them in convenient shell-holes, and remained there, like Brer Rabbit "saying nuffin," until dusk. They were in a perfect wasp's nest of enemy machine-gun pits, and an incautious head above ground would have been inevitably of no further use to its owner. Moreover, they were within the enemy's lines, and his wire lay between them and home. After nightfall, Lieutenant Dunning made a dash for safety. Though badly burned in face and hands, he, followed by his Sergeant, started to crawl across the Bosche trenches and, worse, through the Bosche wire. It must have demanded unusual grit to handle the obstinate wire-strands with his maimed hands. The rest of the crew followed, but lost touch, for they were unfortunately all captured. The C.O. and Sergeant made their haven, their clothes torn to rags, and their strength all but gone. Dunning, ignoring his injuries, reported immediately to his unit, and his detailed description of the situation on that sector proved extremely precious in helping forward our next onslaught.

Both these fine lads were awarded our M.C.

A name which has occurred with equal frequency in the casualty and the honours lists—that of Major Elliott Hotblack, D.S.O., M.C., and a bar in both—appears for the last time on 29th September. Though his duties as Intelligence Chief ought to have taken up every minute of his time, he found it unusually difficult not to join in a scrap, particularly if we were getting the worst of it. He was pursuing his "lawful occasions" in the thick of the fighting when a sudden break in the prevailing mist revealed a German strong point to the south, dominating the position and precluding any further advance. It had to be destroyed, but, strictly, Hotblack's job was to communicate that necessity to

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the proper quarter for carrying it out, and leave it at that.

Still, precious few soldiers worth their salt have ever stuck to bare duty, and Hotblack was anything but a stickler. Rushing over to two Tanks, he directed them on to the objectionable target, jumped in one Tank and started it off—so as to make quite certain his orders would be duly carried out. Sailing into action he was soon in the thick of the hornets.

So heavy was the enemy machine-gun fire that the gunners of our two Tanks could not serve their own weapons. The Germans were at close quarters and recklessly exposing themselves. This was too provocative for Hotblack. Thrusting open the revolver loopholes of his borrowed Tank, he emptied his revolver repeatedly into the enemy ranks.

They were driven off, but he was wounded in the head and temporarily blinded. In addition, both Tanks were shortly knocked out with great thoroughness by German field guns, and almost every man in both crews wounded. That did not prevent them from driving off every Bosche in sight once they got free of their Tanks. Disregarding his wounds and partial blindness, Major Hotblack turned to face the extremely unpleasant situation which a handful of wounded men had to meet with an infuriated enemy not many yards distant. First he got his wounded to a safe place; then collecting all the infantry he could find at a loose end he formed them into a rather ragged Last Stand, to hold up the expected Bosche counter-attack, which, however, did not come off. This being the third occasion on which Major Hotblack was wounded in the head, his superiors decided that it was too indispensable to the Corps, in respect of intelligence, to be allowed any further opportunities of being blown off. Why they did not simultaneously decide that any further bars were

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inadequate, and make sure of having one thoroughly representative V.C. in the flesh, is one of the insoluble psychological problems of army mentality.

After four years of trench stagnation we were now back to open-country warfare. The cavalry hoped to realize their long-deferred chance, but in the face of masses of desperate machine gunners it would have been simple suicide for them to lead an attack. The Tanks only were appropriate, and they had been reduced to the squeezed-orange stage—not a bolt or a pin in reserve.

How it was done is a mystery, but Tanks somehow or another did contrive to get themselves into fighting trim, and up to the very end were battering at the back door of the German Army. That back door was wide open at last, only we were almost too tired to step inside.

The October actions, grouped together as the battle of the Selle, saw much crossing of rivers by the Tanks, in which the convenient hexagonal cribs invented by the Staff were invaluable. The enemy generally withdrew as soon as attacked, but there were isolated detachments which knew how to die before they would surrender. As a proof that the Bosche had lost hope of further resistance, we made a huge haul of 475 guns to only 20,000 prisoners. Before, he had clung to his guns.

The last action in which a considerable body of heavy Tanks took part was Maubeuge, on 4th November, and until Armistice Day the light Tanks and armoured cars were mainly employed.

Captain Edward Samuel Garrod, M.C., D.C.M., did good work near Bousies on 23rd and 24th October with the 10th Battalion. He had a most testing time, being in action continuously for twelve hours, and had no real rest for the two whole days of 23rd and 24th October. He was a Section Commander of four Tanks, which he led into the fight on foot right into the village of Bousies.

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He and his Tanks completely cleared the village, during which he was, of course, exposed to being picked off at any minute. He then proceeded alone on a reconnoitring trip, which enabled him to direct with telling effect the fire of his Tanks, and also to give the supporting infantry precise information of the enemy positions. The following day he carried on with unabated energy, showing complete disregard of his own peril.

One of his gunners, Private Edward Hearn, was inspired by his Section Commander's gallantry also to play the man. After going through the stiff first day he was wounded early in the second day's action, and suffering as well from gas, and yet he managed to keep his six-pounder going all through the day. It was owing to his endurance that the Tank was able to fight at all, as the remainder of the crew—apart from himself and the driver—were too badly gassed to do anything. Private Hearn, unflinching in his devotion to duty, practically fought his Tank single-handed.

This same Private—now a Sergeant—had but a short time before barely escaped being drowned in the Sambre Canal when his Tank, too pushful, dived in and under the dirty water. Luckily there was a crane Tank handy, and the members of the crew were severally hauled out by the slack of their breeches, to the intense joy of the watching troops. As the Canal had been sprayed with gas and H.E. fumes it was ringed with dead fish, some of which had been some time deceased. It was not a place for a bath. For weeks afterwards the appearance of any member of this particular crew was met by shouts of "Kippers for tea!"—referring back to their late companions of the bath.

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CHAPTER
TWENTY

ARMOURED CARS

Material from the Tank Corps "Book of Honour" and Commander Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., M.P.

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CHAPTER TWENTY

Armoured Cars

THERE were several kinds of armoured vehicles in use even during the early days of the war embodying the idea of a moving-gun or machine-gun platform. In fact armoured cars for road or rail had long before been tried, but owing to their being limited to roads they were frequently found wanting, in France. The Duke of Westminster equipped a fleet of these cars, which had an adventurous if short career in 1914.

When trench warfare became the settled mode that seemed to ring-off the armoured cars, at any rate in the B.E.F., and they retired behind the scenes or moved to other Fronts. With the coming of the Tanks, which were of course only wheel-less armoured cars fitted with tracks, once more the latter took their call. They became the road cavalry, the skirmishers of the heavy Tanks. For cross-country work the Whippets were indispensable, but with the renewal of the war of movement there were many occasions when the far speedier armoured cars would be and were extremely useful. For large bodies of troops must use roads for their transport, and always will.

This was notably true in the course of our advance on 8th August 1918, where the 17th Battalion Tank Corps, made up of armoured cars, did gallant service. They were operating mainly on the Villers-Bretonneux road. Lieutenant E. J. Rollings was in command of a section, and had to cross a heavily shelled area. He carried this out with great dash and skill, and then penetrated a village still strongly held by the enemy. How far he

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advanced is proved by the fact that amongst the many casualties he inflicted were some Staff Officers. He also succeeded in stampeding a large amount of enemy transport.

His reconnaissance work was most valuable, reports being sent back to his H.Q. by pigeon.

Further, Lieutenant Rollings finished off his day's work by bringing his section back to our lines undamaged and without losing a single man.

Another subaltern, Lieutenant N. C. Clark, had an exciting journey in the teeth of heavy fire through wooded country. He bumped his way over awkward obstacles, clearing the enemy out of their posts in the broken ground. This involved very skilful driving, and after many jolts and miraculous escapes from break-downs he at length drove his cars right into the enemy's lines. Shelling was now intense, and two of his cars had their wheels broken. In spite of this, Clark managed to bring them back safely, but before this he caused very considerable loss to the enemy by well-played bursts from his guns. He also belonged to the 17th Battalion.

Naturally the armoured cars were very much hampered by natural and artificial obstacles which would have been ignored by the ordinary Tanks, and so the drivers required a very high standard of coolness and judgment in handling their machines. As the war drew near its close, and fighting became daily more open, the armoured cars had more frequent calls. They were also more needed, since the Tanks had been so hard-worked that they were then only available in small numbers.

A fine action was carried out on the Le Cateau—Maretz road, on 9th October 1918, by Lieutenant Alfred Charles Ridlington, 17th Battalion.

At the request of the infantry he first attacked a powerful machine-gun post and captured the whole

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of its ten machine guns and crews. Then he moved forward with two cars across a stream. One car had crossed, when the bridge was blown up behind him, and Lieutenant Ridlington was faced with the German army and no support whatever.

"When in doubt, attack" was his rule, and he rushed his car forward into and through the villages of Maurois and Honnechy, both strongly held by the Germans. He fired all his guns as he charged through, and put out a number of the enemy.

Next he came up to a railway bridge which the Germans were in the act of blowing up. Ridlington dealt with them so drastically that he saved the bridge for our men coming up behind him. Then, choosing a different route, he returned to his stranded second car and brought his section back unscathed.

The last act of devotion to duty by this unusually gallant battalion is recorded of Lieutenant J. A. E. May, on 7th November.

The countryside was now hopelessly littered with the flotsam of a beaten army, and movement was uncommonly difficult. It was more than that: it was deadly dangerous, for the Germans were continuously exploding mines along all roads. In spite of this, Lieutenant May kept his section in close touch with the enemy, harassing his rearguards and further augmenting the *débâcle*. It was most ticklish work, for at any moment his cars might go up with the road beneath them, but by a judicious blending of *élan* and canniness Lieutenant May overcame all obstacles, and proved to the hilt the value of his particular arm.

The final curtain of the armoured cars on the Western Front was taken at Cologne. For it was they who led the British forces, entering that city in clear advance of all our other troops and coming to their extreme point of advance at the eastern end of the great Rhine Bridge.

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ARMOURED CARS

It has previously been mentioned that a fleet of armoured cars was equipped in 1914 for the B.E.F. by the Duke of Westminster. Other units served on various other Fronts, notably against the Senussi. One special squadron, raised and commanded by Commander Oliver Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., had such an amazing series of adventures over many thousands of miles that it practically conducted a war on its own.

The first field of their operations was the Russian Front, and their kicking-off place Archangel. They were magnificently equipped, everything ready for every emergency, and they were manned by men equally ready to face anything from a blizzard to a sandstorm.

The personal account of their Commander which follows has been given verbatim. It needs little comment. It tells their story ranging from the Arctic Circle to the Caspian and from Armenia to Roumania. They at least were freed from the ghastly stagnation of trench warfare on the Western Front, where their opposite numbers, the Tanks, wallowed in a twenty-mile limit of mud, whilst the armoured cars were ranging from the Caucasus to the Dobrudja.

The units under the command of Locker-Lampson were once more conducting war in a gentlemanly way, like the old Saracens, or our ancestors the Norsemen. They had abundance of fresh air above ground and did not spend most of their time "below decks." Their story then has the spacious freedom of the wind that "bloweth where it listeth." They were one month nearly frozen stiff and the next all but eaten alive by mosquitoes. They did not spend years facing the same old pudding-faced enemy, but had half the most picturesque peoples of the East and Near East as either allies or foes.

On the one hand it is a story of the gay grit and unbeatable resourcefulness which are essentially British, on the other it describes the break-up of a great

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nation, begotten of half-hearted leadership and wholesale starvation, where the wretched Russian soldiery were as shepherdless sheep. It is not too much to claim for the armoured cars that, in the general dry-rot of Russia and Roumania, they alone kept up any real effort at disciplined resistance. They were too a bulwark to the innumerable refugees, whose natural defenders were concerned only with saving their own miserable skins.

The notes are brief, and the reader has to fill in the details for himself. One can without much imaginative effort visualize the daily struggle for existence of this small force surrounded by inhospitable natural obstacles and attached, as a rule, to dispirited and panicky units. That they never lost heart, though it must have been absolutely clear before they had been six months in the country that their Allies had lost theirs, is in itself something of which their fellow-countrymen are justly proud.

"When trench-warfare became general on the Western Front the armoured car (which was really the parent of the Tank of later days) became limited in scope, although as an instrument of warfare its high value was everywhere recognized.

Therefore, in November 1916, the force—known as a Squadron—sailed for Russia, at the special request of the Russian Government. The personnel of the Squadron generally was the same, but it was vastly increased in size and numbers. As a self-contained unit it left nothing to be desired; there was a man for every job and a machine for every emergency, for, in addition to the armoured cars themselves, the unit carried with it the latest type of travelling workshops, wireless cars, ambulances and kitchen wagons. Even a printing press accompanied the Squadron to the many fronts in Russia, Persia, Armenia, Roumania and Galicia.

Inspired by a farewell message from His Majesty the

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King, the unit set sail from Liverpool on 3rd November 1916, on board the s.s. *Umona*, bound for Archangel. Sea-voyages in those days were, naturally, perilous adventures, and my men realized this when we stole during the night down the Mersey river. But they did not anticipate that a five- or six-day voyage would run into one of over fifty days—for it was not until Christmas Day that a landing was effected, but at another spot which was certainly not the one originally determined upon. We arrived at—— But I am going too far ahead; so I will return to a chronicle of our adventures up to the time we sighted the desolate and snow-covered wastes of the grim North.

Loaded to the last ounce with men and material, the *Umona* waddled along toward the Faroe Islands, and into one of the greatest storms ever experienced in that remote part of the northern hemisphere. Cook-houses, latrines, and all other deck hamper went by the board in one swoop, and for two days, with ovens cold and heating apparatus smashed, and water pouring into the hold (in which all the cars had broken loose from their moorings and were jostling each other in the most chaotic confusion), we spent a miserable and certainly anxious time. A man is not himself when his stomach is an aching void. Moreover, matters were made worse when there was a shortage of drinking water (there never was any water available for washing purposes).

Nevertheless, the spirit of officers and men was good, and accorded with the best traditions of the Senior Service, of which we were an important adjunct. Sea-sickness was so prevalent that the sick-bay was full of patients, and even the main dining-room had its floor covered with prostrate men, many of whom had to have injections of strychnine. And to add to the general trouble we had begun to enter the belt where for three months in the year eternal darkness is an accomplished and accepted

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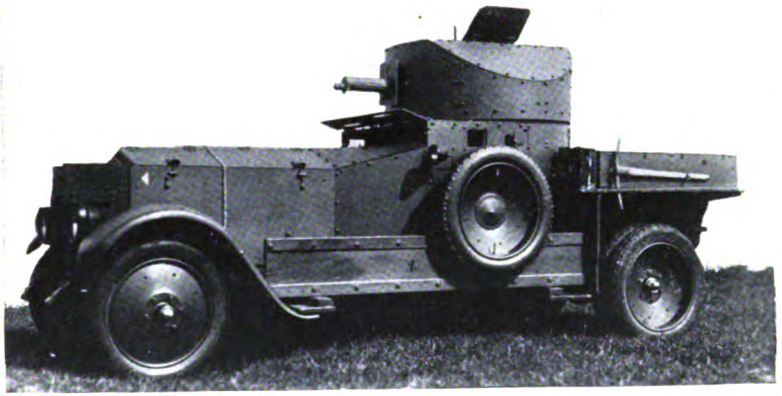

Top—ROLLS-ROYCE ARMOURED CAR

The type used on the Russian Expedition under Commander Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O.

Bottom—SCENE ON THE GUILLEMONT ROAD, SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1916

An armoured car standing by; note the wounded waiting to be evacuated.

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fact. But even so—such is the optimistic nature of the Briton—spirits soon rose, and, in spite of cold, we all of us managed to interest ourselves in something. We held concerts and we printed a newspaper, the *Archangel Herald*, and in doing so we created, I believe, a record, since prior to the day it was born this newspaper was the first to be printed so far north, and under such conditions.

We rounded the North Cape and set our face towards Archangel, there to embark and commence a long trek to the sunny lands of the East. But it was a case of man proposing and ice disposing. We were caught in that ice, and for days remained fixed immovable in its cold bosom. Matters looked decidedly bad, for no one could prophesy how long we should remain thus, or how soon we would be rescued. It was certainly terrifying to look around the ship, to see nothing but one solid mass of whiteness, with no movement, and no sound beyond the eerie whistling of the deadly north wind, carrying with it the dreaded frost-bite. Our boat was stout, but even so, should there be a shifting of the wind, and a corresponding movement of the ice-mass, there would be such pressure as to stave in the sides of even the strongest vessel. We were anxious, too, as to the food supply and water.

However, our fears were not realized, for, thanks to our wireless call, an ice-breaker, steaming hard and crashing its way through hummocks, reached us in the nick of time. A consultation between all concerned elicited the patent fact that it was sheer madness to attempt to make Archangel, and it was decided to return to an ice-free port, east of the North Cape, and on the Lapland frontier. This was Alexandrovsk, lying at the end of a long fjord—a rocky, barren spot, but a haven of refuge, and a place to stretch one's legs and to build fires and to drink clear water. We steamed up the

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fjord in the afternoon of Christmas Day, relieved beyond measure. But we were not to land easily or without further mishap. In the peculiar light at that time of the day, reminiscent of one of London's densest yellow fogs, we saw something loom up suddenly on our port-bow, and before we could realize what it was there was a grinding noise, followed by an awful shuddering of our ship. We had collided with another steamer—loaded from deck to keel with dynamite! But for the prompt action of the officers of both ships the adventures of the Squadron would have ended, and these notes would not have been written. As it was, we were badly holed, and had to make for the harbour (?) with all possible speed. We moored and then (as far as the light would allow us) we saw what was to be our home for nearly four months. The predominant note was snow, and plenty of it, but here and there, where the wind blew the snow, we could see rock, and plenty of that too. A more desolate place could hardly be imagined; there was there that same awful stillness, that want of life and movement, that silences the most inveterate talker. The majesty of Nature was overwhelmingly impressive—and oppressive.

A momentary hesitation, followed by a squaring of our shoulders—and we began to act. The first item in our programme was to send a party ashore to find accommodation and to establish spots on which we could build our habitations, there to remain to work and to play while our ship returned home with the damaged cars to be repaired and sent out to us again.

Our disembarkation was quickly accomplished, although the work was terrific. There were no roads and no flat places anywhere; it was all rock, chunks of it, towering one piece upon another. So everything had to be man-handled; everything to be carried on quickly and roughly made sledges. And all the while wooden huts had to be built. Fortunately, there were a number

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of houses already in existence—wooden shanties of rough logs, but serviceable, although infested with insects varied in form and ferocious in nature.

Space does not permit me to say all I would like concerning ourselves at Alexandrovsk. Altogether, I suppose, we were happy because we were philosophical. We were there and there we had to stay, and it was no use "grousing." Better make the best of it, and that we did. We drilled and we worked and we played, always hard, and we were exceedingly fit in consequence. There was a total absence of the temptations of the town, and we had no alcohol, and nobody seemed to want it. A regular day, with a spare but sufficing diet, did more for us than any other form of living. If we had had a little more daylight, or occasionally a glimpse of the sun, we should have *looked* the healthiest fellows alive. We were that, but we did not *look* it, for in the north, with its darkness, where the sun is never seen at this time of the year, one becomes pallid. We played football on rock, on which we slithered and slid and secured goals, but kept our toes from frost-bite—the scourge of these latitudes. We tobogganed in weird sleds of our own invention, and if we did not break our necks it was only because of that little cherub who sits up aloft to look after poor Jack.

We discharged cargo from ships and transported that cargo over two hundred miles of dreary waste to a railhead that ran to Petrograd. We pumped out other ships that had struck mines, and we went out to sea in the one small motor-vessel which we possessed to rescue the crews of ships that had been caught in the ice as we were. And our surgeons removed the fingers and toes of many who had walked for miles over the ice to shore in their desperate efforts to avoid death by starvation and cold—a fatal combination that is terrible in its agonizing torments.

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All things, good or bad or indifferent, come to an end, and in April we tried again to reach Archangel. The ice was still there, but it gave way more quickly to the ice-breaker (wonderful ships these) which preceded us. And there was now light and sun, and soon there would be no darkness at all, but eternal daylight—and interminable mosquitoes using drastic methods to secure sustenance.

Archangel, now open to navigation, full of ships from all corners of the world, each and all carrying war material. Docks crowded with the same stuff, awaiting rail transport to the Front and to the arsenals and workshops of the towns. Russians, Chinese, Tartars, Samoyedes, Lapps—a heterogeneous mass, toiling and sleeping and ever passing something along somewhere to be used to slay or to save—shells or food or medicines. And then one day all of it goes up in a mighty explosion (thanks to treachery) and 3000 or more of those workers cease their labour, and more ships have to come with their cargoes to make good the loss of material, and more men from the south and the west and the east of Russia to replace the sleepers. The war must be prosecuted ; there must be no stoppage. No one and nothing shall stay it.

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CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE

ARMOURED CARS—Continued

By

Commander Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., M.P.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Armoured Cars (continued)

By Commander Locker-Lampson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.C., M.P.

"OUR stay at Archangel was brief. We were ordered to hurry south, and therefore we moved off as soon as we had landed our material and loaded it on the three mighty trains that were to carry us, and constitute our home for three weeks. A rousing send-off from the Queen City of the Arctic, and a vociferous welcome when we reached Moscow a week later.

On 7th June this ancient capital of Russia awoke to find itself invaded by strange figures in khaki. Moscow stared, and rubbed its eyes, and then realized that the strangers were allies, and in true Moscow fashion welcomed them. Every man of the Squadron was "adopted" by somebody that day. Outside the station great crowds, numbering thousands of people, waited to give us a hearty welcome. From the station we marched through the city, headed by a Russian band, to the English church, where a short service was held. We were warmly cheered and pelted with flowers as we passed, and the streets were beflagged and filled with hand-shaking throngs. In the evening, during the performance in the Moscow Art Theatre, our appearance in the auditorium was greeted with salvos of cheering, and the public demanded that all the officers should stand on the stage to receive a typical Moscow welcome.

The next morning we headed toward the Caucasus, by way of Rostoff-on-Don, where we halted for one day. This city is the gateway of the south-east, and in many respects is remarkable. It blends the East and the West.

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It has Eastern streets and Western boulevards, on which are built stores and restaurants that compare favourably with any in London or Paris or New York. Then it was prosperous, lying as it did in the great corn and coal belts, and in touch with the world through the Black Sea. To-day Rostoff, thanks to Bolshevism, is ruined, and peopled with Commissars and the hangers-on of revolution.

Three days later we reached Vladikavkaz, in the heart of the Caucasus, and the western terminus of the great Georgian Military Road that climbs up over Kesbek Mountain, which is over 16,000 feet high.

What a contrast Vladikavkaz is to Archangel and our little home in Alexandrovsk. Here in this city, nestling in the lower ranges of the Ezburg, our eye is delighted with all the scenes and people and scents of the East. Here we find intermingled, sometimes quarrelling, but normally living amicably each with the other, Tartars, Gruzins, Apelsins, Caucasians, Armenians, Russians, and goodness knows how many other nationalities and races. Men wearing what we regard as the Cossack uniform, belted and armed with pistol and kinjahl (a sword encased in a silver scabbard), ride daily throughout the streets. They come from the mountains; proud men with fearless eyes and quick temper, and many of them live as brigands, as most of them are. They take toll from the passengers going 'over the Road' from Vladikavkaz to Tiflis. They do not consider themselves robbers, but men entitled to 'recognition in practical form.' And usually they get it, and nobody seemed to worry much over the fact in those days. It paid to be philosophical and to cut one's losses without comment, otherwise something else might be cut and comment would not only be superfluous but impossible.

It was essential for the Squadron to remain some weeks in Vladikavkaz; firstly to allow the men to re-

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cuperate after their long journey from the North, and to refit and make good the equipment. Eventually everything was ready for movement, and early one morning the perilous climb over the Great Road was commenced. We left in an Equatorial heat, and a few hours later we were groping our way through snow, with mighty depths yawning on our left or right, still climbing, still negotiating hazardous hairpins, where the slightest error of judgment would send driver, crew and car to Eternity. And then, Mount Kazbeck reached and passed, and the downward trail to Tiflis—and as many dangerous turnings, and air-sickness blurring the vision, and nerves not what they were. Mountains everywhere, and this winding ribbon, at places not an inch wider than the car it had to carry, seemed to lose itself on plateaux at one moment and in the valleys below at the next. Beneath us we saw nothing but clouds, so high were we, and we could only judge the progress of our descent by the gradually increasing temperature. But over all there clung a dew that chilled—and played havoc with the carburettors. But we did not lose a car, although we had more than a hundred, and we created in consequence a record. And I believe we travelled the Great Road in record time, a wonderful achievement seeing that not one of the drivers had ever been up a mountain before.

Tiflis was reached. Here again we saw a city with the characteristics of Europe and Asia. Here, too, we found strongly predominant the influence of the Armenian, but there, over the road, with its squat grim buildings, the guiding hand of the Russian military machine, and cheek by jowl with it a handsome building inspired by a Frenchman or an Italian. And in the little side alleys, dark and mysterious, with roads littered with filth, we discerned (and smelled) the Turk and the Persian. But we could not tarry here, for the Grand Duke Nicholas

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was awaiting us at Saraykamish, forty miles on, to inspect us, and to install us in our base of operations in the Persian and Armenian sectors.

No time was wasted in settling down here. Bases were laid, and advanced bases were established all along the road leading to Musch and Bitlis in Armenia, and to Lake Urmia in Persia, and as soon as they were ready, with our lines of communications intact, with our food and ammunition supply assured, we commenced operations against the wily Turk.

We were now divided into three sections, and the third debouched from Kepri Ke (on the Musch—Bitlis road) to support the Russians in their assault upon Erzerum.

The story of how all three sections negotiated the terrible roads on the Armenian and Persian plains and the rocky road to Erzerum has been told in many a book and journal, and it is an epic. Picture to yourself travelling over 'roads' that were merely earth beaten flat, bridging dried watercourses, fording uncharted rivers, and in a land that gave nothing in the shape of food, or even fuel. Each sector was isolated and had to look to itself, and all the while keep contact with the bases. Six hundred miles from railhead, away from our base at Saraykamish, and petrol and ammunition running short, and sweating days and freezing nights, and the unseen snipers in the hills, a report and a death, and the burning by us of a village next day, or rounding up Turks and Kurds—such was our position, but all the time the officers and men were splendid, and the greatest steadying influence the wavering Russian troops, war-weary and ill-equipped, ever met with in those dark days.

Our operations were successful all along the line, our line of communication was never broken, and no base failed to function. Perhaps at times we were entirely without petrol (our life-blood), and sometimes

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anxious over the next meal, but such was our organization that no man failed another.

With the advent of the rainy season, when roads become quagmires and will no longer carry heavy traffic, we had to cease operations in Persia, Armenia and on the Erzerum road, and transfer to the Dobrudja, in Roumania. We returned to Saraykamish, refitted and cleaned up man and machine, and made the long trek across the northern shore of the Black Sea. We enjoyed the trip, but our rejoicings would have been tempered by reflection had we known what we were going to meet at our destination.

Mackensen was passing rapidly through Roumania, and he struck hard and quickly at Rimnik, and took 10,000 prisoners. We had to help to stem the tide, and small in numbers though we were we had the satisfaction of knowing that our assistance was of great value. We seemed to be here, there and everywhere. Blowing up bridges, destroying oilfields, burning aeroplanes to prevent them falling into enemy hands, saving stranded nursing detachments, men, women, children, and even parrots. West of Viziru, during the battle of 26th December, we repulsed the enemy to such extent that we broke his line, much to the surprise of all the army commanders, who found it difficult to believe that a handful of men could accomplish what whole battalions had failed to do.

The Roumanian retreat was really horrible, and nerve-racking even to the coldest-blooded fighter—roads littered with human impedimenta, civilians with their families and pitiful household effects were absolutely demoralized—they were fleeing blindly from they knew not what—scared almost to death—limping, running, falling exhausted—jostling and fighting to get in front of the other man—groping as if suddenly stricken with blindness and realizing the awful truth. And through

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this stream of humanity came at full speed demoralized Roumanian troops—weaponless, with gear thrown aside —and artillery tearing along the road, horses foam-flecked, thrashed unmercifully, such was the fearful driving force that turned men into terrified, screaming animals. And many fell beneath the heavy wheels, and perhaps the death was merciful. A woman, half naked, with her hair flying in the breeze, red-eyed with the glaze of terror, oblivious of everything, yet hugging to her bosom a rusty cage containing a parrot! Across the bridge, mined, and under which men of our Squadron sat ready to destroy when the crowd had passed, this mass of human automata rumbled and stumbled and fell over the side, into the Danube. Cumbersome barges at the water's edges rapidly filling with agonizing humans imploring that they shall be cast off to set sail down the river, or up the river, or anywhere, for that matter, so long as it was to a place of safety.

And in this terrific maelstrom our men advanced and retreated and destroyed life and saved life. Helped here and there, calmly, cheerful, with the old worn jokes on their lips and the Woodbine (the last one), half-consumed, nestling in the ear—a precious thing to be used when 'things settled down.'

Nothing could be done to save Roumania. Everywhere there were disorder and demoralization, and the retreat had become a rout, and war, as far as we were concerned, was finished in that sector, and we were called into Galicia, where the same state of affairs awaited us.

By now the Russian armies were becoming panicky, and they were to all intents and purposes broken reeds. The subversive elements were busy among them, and revolt was soon to come. We were attached to the Seventh Army and stationed at Kozowo, but to let the weight of our influence be felt among the wavering Russian troops we were split into several sections, and reached

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out as far as Tarnopol. In many cases we abandoned the cars and fought in the trenches, where we gave heart to the Russians. But as soon as we left the big *débâcle* commenced. It is to-day universal knowledge how the whole of an army, absolutely panic-stricken, turned and fled, blindly, unreasonably, away from an enemy no greater in strength than themselves. The whole of the Front was a seething mass of deserters. Nothing could stop them—runaways were shot down by their officers wholesale, and even we threw our armoured cars across the road to stem the tide, although it was as if a terrier were endeavouring to impede the progress of a mad elephant. We did our best, and it was recognized by all the Corps Commanders that our presence there at that critical time would have turned the tide—but one cannot fight blind fear prodded by traitors. We were not fighting the Austrians—we were having our first engagement with stark revolution.

In a single day an army has vanished—there is no movement—it is the empty stage cluttered with ' props ' after the play has finished. But no curtain hides the hideousness of the masks—they were all round us then. Men wandering hither and thither, lost to all sense of reason, decency and direction. Starving, some of them, yet knowing not how to find food, to save themselves. Fatalists all, ready to welcome anything, even death. Abandoned guns, prostrate horses, dead and dying, beside them. Crashed aeroplanes. Corpses already commencing to bloat. Nobody to give commands and nobody to obey.

So, sorrowfully and silently we collected our belongings, patched up our wounds, took our Woodbine from the ear—our operations in Russia are finished, and in a day or so we shall struggle northward, over the old route, Moscow, Vologda, Archangel, Liverpool, and home, to begin again our service in the cause of our Empire."

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CHAPTER
TWENTY-TWO

L'ENVOI

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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

L'Envoi

WHAT has been written in the previous chapters is a somewhat untabulated record of the evolution of a Citizen Force into a Regular Arm. The Tanks were for years distinctly not "One of Us." They were too unconventional, too prone to think for themselves and not along well-worn grooves, to fit nicely into the army machine.

This point has been most aptly illustrated by Colonel Le Q. Martel, C.M.G., D.S.O. (himself a Regular), who was one of the three original members of the first Tank Corps Staff:

"As our Staff expanded, various men who had reached the top in their own pre-war professions were invited to join. One of these, Colonel Searle, was appointed Technical Expert at H.Q. He was made a Colonel straight away, with a free hand to run the Tanks' technical side. On the whole his view of army organization was favourable, and he gradually fitted himself into the general scheme." Occasionally he struck a snag in some old-timer, over-starched and over-literal, who had swallowed King's Regulations whole, and consequently could not see an inch beyond them.

So the alert Searle could rarely resist a genial dig at the soldiers whenever the chance came his way.

"After he had been with us a month," says Colonel Martel, "we asked him at dinner one night what he thought of the army. He replied: 'I can't quite make you out! In civil life you go to a man's office, argue it out and come to some settlement of the point in dispute.

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In the army you walk into an officer's orderly-room, count up the pips on his sleeve, compare them with your own, and say: "It's yours, you've won!" It is nothing but a game of dominoes.'"

A second equally pointed story occurred in 1917. It illustrates once more the clash between the military and civilian elements.

The Tanks were scheduled to attack at a certain hour a strong point. In this case a preliminary bombardment by the heavies was ordered. The Brigade was detailed by 'phone from the office of the Major-General commanding —— Corps H.A. to fire six salvos with every gun working. Then followed the map-spotting of the objective. "M.P. 16. A.N. 9." The Adjutant of the Brigade took down the message. He was one Captain X., a very slow-speaking, quick-thinking coffee-planter from the East.

"'M.P. 16. A.N. 9' you said, sir?" he drawled.

"Yes!"

"That is in our front-line trench!"

A spluttering came through the 'phone, and the Brigade Major's raucous voice rasped a little more as he snapped:

"What the devil do you mean, X.?"

"What I say. That map-spotting is in our front line."

X. had not even consulted his own map. He had been in that sector for months and knew his maps by heart, having a very clear head. His habit was to apply himself wholly to the matter in hand. The Major-General was sitting opposite his Brigade Major and was positively dumbfounded by the Adjutant's assertion. His utterly mechanized brain could not take in the bare thought of a mere temporary Captain trying to teach the Staff their job. The fate of our about-to-be-slaughtered infantry was immaterial.

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Snatching the telephone from his subordinate, he jerked out:

"This is Major-General Y. speaking. Do I understand you to say that my instructions are wrong?"

"I repeat, sir, M.P. 16. A.N. 9 is in our front line."

"Hold on, X., I'll have the figures checked. This will, of course, end your usefulness here."

X. murmured to himself: "Silly old sheep. I'm in no danger. Our infantry are!"

Febrile activity at Corps H.Q., as they have mislaid the right map. At last it is spread out and the figures checked.

Then, in a very small voice, the Brigade Major sends along an amended message: "N.P. 16. A.M. 9. Six salvos from all batteries."

X., with an even more pronounced drawl, repeats: "N.P. 16. A.M. 9. All batteries. Six salvos. I'll order Battery Action at once, sir. Good-night, sir."

The point of this story is that if X. had been a regular he would have probably preferred to doubt his own judgment rather than to contradict a Major-General.

The war was won by the combined intelligence and grit of both serving soldiers and civilians. They were complementary. The Tanks were on the border-line ("Soldier and sailor too," like the Marines in the navy) —fighters and mechanics. Professional soldiers alone could never have turned the clumsy vulnerable machines of 1916 into the swift pliant Medium C.'s of the end of 1918. Nor could civilians alone have infused into the "little better than a rabble" personnel of December 1916 the disciplined fighting spirit that made such finished operations as Cambrai and Villers-Bretonneux, Hamel and Amiens, splendid actualities.

Spit and polish plus dungarees and elbow-grease sound rather an unpleasant composition; and yet it was their fusion which made the Tanks deserve every word of our

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Commander-in-Chief's final eulogy. This extract from Haig's last dispatch from the B.E.F. fitly ends our work :

". . . Since the opening of our offensive of August 8th tanks have been employed in every battle, and the importance of the part played by them in breaking the resistance of the German infantry can scarcely be exaggerated. The whole scheme of the attack of August 8th was dependent upon tanks, and ever since that date, on numberless occasions, the success of our infantry has been powerfully assisted or confirmed by their timely arrival. So great had been the effect produced upon the German infantry by the appearance of British tanks that in more than one instance, when for various reasons real tanks were not available in sufficient numbers, valuable results have been obtained by the use of dummy tanks painted on frames of wood and canvas.

" It is no disparagement of the courage of our infantry, nor of the skill and devotion of our artillery, to say that the achievements of those essential Arms would have fallen short of the full measure of success achieved by our armies had it not been for the very gallant and devoted work of the Tank Corps, under the command of Major-General H. J. Elles.

" (*Signed*) DOUGLAS HAIG, F.M."

Floreat R.T.C.!

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